

# Formation of lay missionaries

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The laity is one of the unresolved themes in the Church, of which much is spoken and for which there are so few places where address it seriously.

The laity has been regarded for centuries as a "minor" at the service of the clergy. One of the main structural causes of inequality in the Church has been, and remains, the preparation received by laity and clergy. We all know that formation becomes a liberating element of people when it's put to the service of the needed. And it can also be an instrument of oppression to dominate, in some way, those that "do not know". This is evident among developing nations, where ignorance is a way to remove the people's ability to decide.

In the history of the Church have also worked, and continued, such mechanisms regarding the laity. As the secular "does not know, as it has no preparation" clergy take the liberty to assume all the responsibilities and decide on issues affecting in special way the lives of the laity (family, work, economy, etc.).

Until recent years the mission *ad gentes* was also exclusive of a sector of the Church: religious, priests and bishops. The awakening of the missionary vocation of the laity in the Church has encountered difficulties that arise from the excessive clericalism of the Catholic Church. Against the clerical idea of "taking over the mission," the laity claimed their place in the work of evangelization. Do not want this to be a concession to the "traditional mission specialists Ad Gentes" but recognizing that their vocation is a right and duty emanating from its Christian essence.

In order of these claims gain value, the lay missionary is increasingly aware that if they want their missionary work to be considered a true vocation, like other vocations in the Church, they must form themselves seriously. If the religious or priest employs several years to form a specific way ahead of the mission, the layman cannot do less and have to put apart their emergency rush to really serve the people is being sent.

The maturity of any group of lay and vocational identity within the People of God, depend on the strength preparation received.

## Formation objectives for lay missionary

We affirm that the input of formation that we talk can not be reduced to an academic or theological one. While this is necessary, as it was indicated by the Episcopal Commission of Mission document on "Lay Missionaries" (1997) by insisting on formation in missiology, anthropology, ecclesiology, inculturation methodology, analyzes the world today, general cooperation lines, etc. (N. 9.4), but the lay formation has an specific dynamic where life experience is essential, and where an adult faith constantly growing that it is confronted with others and with the world, is the best formation program.

Some goals that cannot be missed in any preparation of lay missionaries are:

- 1. Discernment of a specific vocation.** Formation needs to ensure the elements and the necessary means to a young person or an adult can make a real vocational discernment. Not enough to want or have desire. One is a missionary because is send by the Church and for this the ecclesial community or group to which one belongs must have assurances that the candidate is suitable and their motivations are genuine. That is, the service to other human beings is an expression of the faith in Jesus.

**2. Assume an identity.** The discovery of the specifically missionary vocation takes the youth or adult to create a peculiar "style" of living their Christian faith, first of all here and then there. These characteristics of a particular vocation are usually given within a group or community. It's what can be slowly defined as the sense of "belonging to" not in an exclusive or elitist sense to separate from the others, but as an integrator element of itself to identify with others.

Hence the need of time and space, and also a formation with content and motivations that sustain and promote the election made to create its own identity.

**3. Deepen their faith and vocation as lay missionary, personally and as a church group.** Faith takes its own characteristics, spirituality, a Christian commitment itself, a unique way of being in the world, etc., when that faith is marked by the mission ad gentes.

**4. Specific preparation in sense of the mission received.** Nationally we have the prestigious school of missiology, currently teaches at the Institute St. Pius X, which offers a current mission theology and appropriate criteria to address religion in the context of the mission ad gentes. But each mission has its own characteristics (language, culture, history of the country, ecclesial presence, project details, lifestyle, etc.) that should be well worked if we want to live the mission from the other and not from our mind and cultural schemas.

**5. Lifelong and permanent formation.** We are beings continually growing, constantly formation, so we must be attentive to get such formation both on mission site and when we return. Here there is often a gap for those returning from the mission to find no ecclesial or vital spaces and content appropriate to their reality.

### **A formation way**

We have said that the formation of lay missionaries must have its own dynamic adapted to their reality. However must be saved, that it is an "integral formation, spiritual and moral as well as scientific and technical" (LM. 9.1). This dynamics is marked by the rhythms of the laity: married or single, with or without children, the type of employment, if any, etc.

This learning process has to be long in time (now "1-5 years, although most of the entities are above two years and almost always includes periods of community live as a previous preparation for life in the mission" LM. 9.3), and progressive.

For the formation to be robust and produce internal unity, not uniformity, we must respect the rhythms of each itinerary, but in any case we have to talk about:

- a) remote formation: Not casual or only in function of departure for mission.
- b) permanent formation: global programming with moments of confrontation, courses, etc. and all this evaluated.
- c) projected formation: as the layperson sent is the expression of the local church that sends.

The mission is a complex and dynamic reality (EN, n. 17) where they will combine many aspects such as the explicit announcement, the integral liberation, interreligious dialogue, etc., so formation will respect the different ways to evangelize one can found there, where we are going to work. It is not the same a proposed parish pastoral-dominated announcement that another social where there will be a marked accent of social denunciation, or more strictly work project where they will play an important role in personal witness sometimes fully extra ecclesial context.

Some important highlights of this dynamic formation:

\* **From a life project** which will help the candidate to fully orient his life around mission objectives and from which it has decided to follow. In this project must be embodied an intense life of faith and prayer. Such faith is expressed in concrete pastoral commitment. Although it may sometimes coincide with the labor of its own, this commitment will always be programming and with an evaluation. Within commitment will accommodate the missionary animation of the local church where its faith was born and from where its send. The project should consider their attitudes toward wealth, interpersonal relationships, etc. His/her life in the service of the Gospel and the mission is marked from the beginning of their vocational choice.

\* **From a reference group or an ecclesial community or**, where they can live the missionary spirit. The community is the ideal educational place, also for programming, confrontation of reality itself, and also checks growth. This community meeting cannot be sporadic. At least weekly have to find time to be together, reflect, pray, share life and faith ... and occasionally celebrate such faith. The community is not only an emotional refuge, but also a place of confrontation, fraternal correction, and a place of personal growth.

\* **With personalized and group guidance accompaniment.** This according to different models: psychological support (test by a specialist), religious (spiritual path), family ... This dynamic will be irreplaceable in any learning process. We realize that it is not easy to find persons to accompany formation processes, and less secular, but this formation aspect is essential for verification and vocational growth.

\* **With an evaluation stage.** It is important that the process is progressive and gradual, and it is also important that there is a check or evaluation at the end of each stage. This assessment would be good to do a three-way: first the candidate, on the other hand the community that accompanies them, and a third part the accompany who follow he/her personally. The experiences unevaluated has the risk to become sterile.

These milestones are not only for preparation time and formation in Spain, but also to stay in mission and afterwards to the difficult time and many times painful return and reintegration into a new reality that is not always warmly open arms.

## **Comprehensive formation**

We all know that today, more than ever, it is not enough to be good for developing missionary activity. In an increasingly complex world requires a solid human, professional and Christian formation.

### **A) Guidelines for human maturity**

For a missionary candidate - religious, priest or layman - is required human maturity foolproof, because their way of life will take you to places and situations where they will often test their psychic structure and staff, and where decisions need to have strong and healthy personality. That is why you need good health, both physical and mental, to survive in adverse situations normally without the person collapses.

While it is easy to detect when a health is strong physically, it is less so when it comes to psychological health, the Episcopal Conference document speaks about the Lay Missionaries of psycho-emotional maturity "understood as a balance of the person and experience of their own sexuality in the status (single or married) that are, adaptability, initiative and teamwork, positive spirit, serene and cheerful face difficulties and problems, willingness to learn, ability to dialogue, valuing others and sacrifice, etc.. It should be emphasized, in the case of sending missionary families the need of emotional balance of the spouses to each other and to the children in family life "(LM 08.02 ). The mission can never be the flight of a personal reality: work, family, emotional ... The poor can not be the subject of experimentation of our own welfare needs. In this sense we must not evade the contribution of the human sciences and there are already several lay groups that use these techniques

with qualified specialists for the selection and testing of the motivations of the candidates. However, any serious community dynamics is also a good reference that can help us in this regard. Now emphasize some of the attitudes that we consider essential for any candidate who wants to choose a lay missionary life:

**a) The capacity for dialogue and openness to others.** It is the inner attitude of mind and heart which communicates with clarity and transparency in order to become real people. Add to that, the willingness to let be guided and accompany; capacity for dialogue and coexistence and aptitude for working with people of character, faith, culture and different nationality.

**b) Teamwork and confrontation with a group** are irreplaceable pedagogical elements to avoid exaggerated individualism. Each day mission is the result of living and working together. It is the community that evangelizes.

**c) The ability to take responsibility** and take charge of their lives and their decisions. In this sense it also verifies the capacity to be able to give a personal response to the various challenges that are in the mission.

**d) The need to deal with unfamiliar situations and sometimes conflicting.** Thus requires some security and radical self-esteem to face such situations.

**e) Overcoming of all cultural, religious, linguistic... ethnocentrism** and radical openness to universal brotherhood. It's all inculturation and respect and value people and the environment with a positive but realistic look of the people who will serve.

**f) A healthy realism.** It is almost inevitable that we always make an idealization of the poor and their environment, of the Church or of the theology of the poor ... and when such idealization plays the dark reality of poverty and sin, the risk is discouraged and throw the towel. The attitude of the believer is to opt for that reality just as they are known with their lights and shadows.

**g) Acceptance of frustration and failure.** It is a human component, but also religious, to take part of failure that belongs to all and especially to those that takes more risk.

**h) Without creating dependencies, or paternalism, or limelight.** Having the ability to respect the freedom of people to be served and not use them to fill our hungry of affectivities success or recognition.

## **B) Guidelines for Christian maturity**

When we speak of the Christian identity of the layman's an open debate aroused no little controversy. The identity of the lay is in the fact of following Jesus of Nazareth and not so much on professionalism or insertion into the realities of the world as the other no lay vocations were outside the professional or temporal realities.

Following Christ is translated into a personal, liberating and a concrete commitment. Some of the attitudes of this monitoring are: the personal encounter with Christ, personal and community prayer, listening to God's Word, the sacraments, the Christian reading of reality, charity in all its forms ... In short, living life from a Christian project. This that is common to all baptized takes a particular accent when it comes to forming a vocation in Christian maturity. We highlight some particular aspects:

**a) From the centrality of the mission.** The mission is not only a choice, but it is a gift of God to the people. The mission is not ours nor the mission of the group who sends: the mission is of the Trinity, and the center of the mission is the Spirit of the Risen Lord to whom they obey with the same dignity and with various ministries both lay and consecrated ministers. A clear awareness of the centrality of the mission will prevent many problems facing the possible temptation of appropriation, group rivalry or frustration at the lack of results after work.

**b) Ascetic attitudes of the Christian tradition**, such as renounce, mortification, sacrifice...; something totally obsolete in our culture of welfare and that will be critical in integrating the pain, sacrifice and frustration involved in mission critical dynamics and the dynamics of faith. Without this radical attitude to serve and not be served, it will be impossible to cover the mission from the gratuity of God that is given to the world.

**c) Specific attitudes of the lay and missionary spirituality.** By the fact of being a layperson, he or she is a transmitter of a new identity through the daily life, simplicity of life, the closeness of life, manual labor or professional, family, children, relationships... but also by the fact of being a missionary came out a number of characteristics that generate a particular spirituality of provisionality, simple and poor media, roaming and exodus, insertion in border situations, of listening, from below...

A paschal spirituality of death and resurrection that is the joy and hope of the people.

**d) Sense of Church.** The II Vatican Council has insisted that the Church is the People of God and communion while proposing a Church that exists for the world. This theory that for over 30 years is hanging in the classrooms of theology, is very far from reality, and here the layperson, and particularly the lay missionary can contribute in a particular way to present another face of Church more according with the Spirit. A new image of the Church here and there. A ministerial church where everyone is involved (both in programming, decision and evaluation) from his own vocation.

The layperson who has "become an adult" is the creator of a new face of Church where fraternal relations are essentially above the dependency relationships "father-son", "top-down". Relationships based on shared responsibility and participation and then inserting a pastoral team.

This new face of being Church cannot be improvised and therefore this way to be active Church should be lived from here. We propose therefor:

\* There must be a clear **commitment** at church. This does not mean that such an undertaking is necessarily within the Church or parish. By their very vocation, the lay missionary is called to be present in a particular way in those distant realities that need to be evangelized (immigrants, marginalized sectors, social pressure groups, etc.). The mission "ad gentes" begins here, from our Christian commitment open to new cultural dimensions of our societies.

\* The missionary candidate must have a strong **sense of belonging** to the Church where he has grown in faith and where they will send you later. Therefore we suggest:

- To be known and recognized as a lay missionary candidate by a Christian community, even if they belong to a group, missionary congregation or institution.

- Living an active participation in community life: liturgy, evangelization...

- The commissioning is made from the community and that the commissioning is ratified officially and publicly by his bishop or diocesan structures.

- There should be a serious involvement of diocesan structures in the sending out, so that they can feel send as lay evangelizers. This involvement cannot be virtual, but it touches the material and economic (medical insurance, travel, social security...) and the more personal level (insertion after returning home, contact during the stay, enrichment of the community who sent him with the experience of returning ...)

\* Meanwhile the layperson sent out tries **to live the mission in this sense of Church** and in the service of a particular church with its lights and shadows. Thus avoiding individualistic snipers or going by himself. The lay missionary is inserted into the diocesan and parish project and as such is recognized by the other agents of evangelization.

It is necessary to cultivate this sense of Church and work along the formative stages, respecting all criticism that is constructive and avoiding aggressive attitudes that generate constant division and possible embarrassment of the people who went to serve.

Only the person who accepts his own reality of sin and misery shows a mature faith that enables him to be church with others, because he knows that God's grace works in reality corrupted by sin to grant salvation.

### **C) Guidelines for a missionary vocational maturity**

In the formation task one should be working on the fact that mission cannot be considered as another experience more, but lies in a call of God to work in their mission to serve the smaller ones and giving one's life. When the candidate clarifies his vocation for mission abroad it is easier that all runs normally.

This means to understand the vocation as a real gift from God that comes from a personal encounter with Jesus Christ that invites the person to begin a journey: to follow Christ to the poorest of the earth. Thus the individual acquires a new identity as disciple and apostle.

Regarding this vocation, however, there is an open debate on the consistency of that vocation: for some years or "ad vitam"? I think that overcome the old geographic patterns of mission, a lay missionary vocation is a vocation that must be understood in the context of a lifestyle choice, not something sporadic or occasional, but a vital choice. The fact that our presence is reduced from three to six years (less than three years is not advisable) does not mean that the schemes used to decide are not fundamental and vital. They play the most essential role for each person, and then the candidate will live from his new reality back in Spain, but always ready to leave again.

But specifically the missionary vocation also carries its own characteristics where the departure is the keyword. Departure to the needed brothers, to those realities or people who have not yet been evangelized.

The own choice of life, emerged after radical encounter with Jesus Christ, leads him to communicate his faith to others. This faith, as we have said, should result in a concrete commitment that is necessary to measure the ability to transmit the message within an ecclesial context (LM, 8.2), because there is not an individual and self-regulation experience.

Some aspects of vocational maturity are:

**a) From their own secular identity.** Starting with a healthy ecclesiology, the candidate must have cleared his lay identity so he does not disappear into a clericalism of substitution due the lack of priests. Clearly lay identity cannot be defined at an opposition of the clergy, or even volunteering. It is not in the opposition of another's that we find our identity, but rather he finds itself face in collaboration and complementarily with the other ministries within the Church.

I think it is not worthy the stereotypes that think that the layperson handles the temporal and the religious or priest come over the spiritual. A layperson is bound to bright with his life and be a witness in the social realities, and also can make an explicit catechetical announcement without denying or betraying his own secular identity. What is important is to live his vocation from this ministries church where are complementarity and thus become the new face of universal brotherhood, starting first by the Church itself.

In this sense we insist on the importance, starting from the formative stages, to work as a team: priests, religious and laity. So the laity should be in charge of their own institutions and also participate in making decision in order to work into the teams when they found them in mission.

**b) From the community.** Knowing that the layperson already participates of the first community that is the family and that is the essence of its secular identity. His testimony often comes from your relationship with his wife or husband, with their children. The missionary commitment is never

individual, but community and ecclesial (EN, n. 60), hence the close communication with the community of origin, and the belonging to the destiny community among which it can establish a real intercom where they give and receive.

This communion between churches that came out is the result of the recognition of the gifts that God gives to the other churches and that enrich us, because those who receive simultaneously provides us and evangelize us (cf. The mission ad gentes and the Church Spain, CEM, Madrid 2001).

**c) Different models of lay involvement in mission.** Models can be varied according to the characteristics of each mission. In my contact with the missionary experience of the laity I have found several models:

\* Pastoral model where explicit proclamation of the Gospel is united with human development activities depend on the mission.

\* Assistance model: where there is a work of critical support to the people, sometimes replacing the public services. These are usually situations of emergencies that cannot last long.

\* Social model: where there is a clear involvement with other non-ecclesial organizations which normally work outside the church structures.

\* Work model: where there is the service in a public structure or in another organization.

Despite the variety of models of lay intervention, I believe that considering formation there are a number of elements that are common to all and that are not optional:

- Empower the poor so that they move from being recipients to be protagonists of their own development, "being a missionary is to help people to be the architect of their own promotion and salvation" (Address of John Paul II in Javier).

- Use simple and manageable ways so that people do not find difficult to give continuity to the work done (cf. Sustainable Development).

- Respect the work done by those who preceded and that mission projects have a continuation until the desired objectives are achieved. Therefore it is important not to rely only on the person who directs.

- Accept the rhythm of the people, which is usually slower than expected. In any case avoid acceleration process by force. Accept the pace of the people means to have the same attitude of the shepherd who knows sometimes to guide the flock standing at the head, others will do it from the inside and most of the time will have to go back, cheering and rooting for the last ones.

- Avoid any privatization or personalism in the evangelization and accepting that this is a team task and should go through team consensus.

- Insert himself on more global plans such as parish, diocesan, organizational...

## **D) The professional formation**

As mentioned above the profession cannot be in the center of the lay missionary vocation, the center of the vocation will be the faith that comes from the personal encounter with Jesus Christ and provokes the following of Jesus. However, we are all aware that the profession plays an important role in the vocation of the laity. Every profession has a place, because what is essential is the dimension of evangelization.

Some observations:

\* The professional realization of the layperson should not be the main focus of the missionary vocation. Otherwise the poor would be used for our own purposes again. For a missionary the

availability and service to the people should prevail. What the people are asking should prevail over what I come to offer.

\* Regarding the professions we will have to be careful not to fall into a hierarchy of professional elite. It is clear that those who request somebody to come to the mission seek the best for their people. But as important as the missionary who is a surgeon operating all day is the surgeon's wife who makes a silent awareness work with women.

\* In most lay groups preparing for the mission, professional training is not the subject of formation, although there are groups and communities who chose profession after discernment in order to perform the mission. When you know the mission you are going to be sent to, you have to upgrade your profession according to the reality you will have to live.

\* It is very important that the process of inculturation is taken seriously if you really want to serve the people. This process has a remote preparation here: language, history of the country, geography, socio political situation, economic, religion, culture, specific needs of the mission or project... but this process of inculturation will continue beyond a good time spent learning the local language, culture, society... You cannot go to the mission and the next day start a direct intervention. The respect for the cultures and the people who you are going to serve requires this effort to look slowly and patiently at the reality from the same position from where the people watch it.

### **Challenges of the formation of lay missionaries**

When it comes to lay missionary formation there is a long way to go. Each group tries to make their best understanding the challenges and difficulties involved in such a formation.

\* The suggestion that the Episcopal Mission Commission does in its paper on "The Mission ad gentes and the Church in Spain" on the establishment of the National Mission Council seems relevant: "The National Mission Council has the double task to help to schedule, manage and review the main cooperation activities nationwide, and to coordinate the work and initiatives of the various missionary institutions". The document refers to a deep reflection on the theology of mission, strengthening formation publications and reflection institutions in order to nourish and renew the missionary thought and missionary responsibility of the Church. There is a need to accompany, guide and discern the various agencies of solidarity and development, laying the foundation and advance the creation of a Centre for Animation, Cooperation and missionary Formation:

- "Form missionary animators who may perform effectively the tasks of animation"
- "Prepare future missionaries taking care of their spiritual, human, theological and cultural formation"
- "Support on-going formation and occasional courses for missionaries,"
- "Promote the exchange of pastoral experiences and theological reflection from the different missionary areas,"
- "Help reintegrate missionaries in their home Church, when they return from the mission"
- "Promote and deepen the missionary spirituality"
- "Convene and prepare the celebration of a National Mission Congress to help the Spanish Church in its missionary responsibility ad intra and ad extra" (Chapter III. 8).

\* This document also welcomes the presence of the laity in the mission ad gentes and agrees to:

- Collaborate with dioceses for a good formation and promotion of the lay vocation,
- Address the formation of the laity who are preparing for the mission ad gentes,
- Find solutions to social, economic needs...
- Update the information about all mission groups and lay associations,
- Promote the exchange of experiences concerning the missionary formation and the missionary vocation of the laity through the National Coordinator of lay missionaries associations.

\* One challenge is that the clergy are often still the trainers of lay people, while the laity should gradually take more and more responsibility for their own formation: "it is desirable that the commissioning is made through public associations of lay missionaries in which mature laity and experienced, knowledgeable of their specific problems and life of the mission, get the responsibility for the selection, formation and monitoring of new vocations... " (LM 7.3). This will require to invest in the formation of lay formators.

\* I think the option for a "community formation of lay people", especially for advanced stages, can be a formula adapted to the needs of the laity: to live their faith and vocation from everyday reality, accepting their difference, the responsibility, respect and complementarity of the charisma of the other person...

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Note

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