OUTLINE – PRESENTATION BY VALDOCCO COMMUNITIES

https://pastoraljuvenil.es/comunidadesvaldocco/

In the 2019-20 academic year, the Salesian National Centre for Youth Ministry, Spain, addressed the need to offer a pastoral proposal for young adults. In spite of the context of the global pandemic, a document was drafted offering the foundations, motivations and guidelines driving the project, as well as a proposal for organisation at various levels and deadlines for its implementation.

Today this dream has come true and, together with a team working in coordination with the Salesian Provinces in Spain, the Valdocco Communities are beginning to take their first steps to accompany young adults in their faith.

Don Jose Miguel Nunez Moreno:

At the Salesian National Centre for Youth Ministry we have been working for a long time on the Faith Education curriculum, and it is one of our priorities, I would almost say it is the backbone of our pastoral activity.

We accompany the processes of growth to maturity in the faith from childhood to the university phase. We have invested a lot of effort, energy and creativity in recent years. But we realised that once the catechumenate stage was over, in the university stage, we did not have the tools to continue accompanying young adults for a period of time, a time fundamentally characterised by vocational discernment and fitting into Christian communities.

For this reason, for the last two years we have been working on a new proposal for accompanying young adults in community, starting from what we were already doing in some Salesian houses, in some provinces, and giving it form, reinforcing the catechumenate phase and above all accompanying these communities of young Christian adults as they ultimately begin to be part of their parish communities, educative and pastoral communities, and above all for them to make definitive vocational choices in their lives.

Valdocco communities are spread throughout Spain and can be found in Aranjuez, Madrid (Atocha (6), Estrecho (7), Paseo de Extremadura), Badalona, Barakaldo, Barcellona (Rocafort (2), Don Bosco Navas (3), Sant Boi de Llogregat (2), Terrasa), Bilbao (Deusto (4), Fuenlabrada (2), Guadalajara (2), Oureznse (2), Málaga, Salamanca (2), Cantabria, Vigo (2), Alicante

The data highlighted at the beginning of this experience would be that there are currently about 70 communities; some have been functioning for more than ten years, and that there is a future for all the places where they exist, since there is at least a group or two of young catechumens willing to take the step.

It is a project also made visible by an increasingly recognised corporate image or logo. The elements that make it up range from the inspiration of the Faith Education curriculum, represented by the hexagon, combining elements such as the root, representing Valdocco, developing through the seed, which evokes concepts such as Community, Proclamation, Celebration and Service. All coloured in different shades of green to symbolise hope, life and youth.

Why continue in community after this journey of education to faith?

Well, there is a general feeling that when you go through the process of being in the youth centre, being a young person or leader, you no longer have any kind of reference or link outside of the Salesian Family and the options provided there, and this is why we believe that it is necessary to have a community of reference in which you can share your faith with others on a daily basis.

What were the first steps like?

This came about because for most of us, after finishing in the youth centre, as leaders, some already married and even with children, our communities of reference did not offer any place or any kind of community where we could continue to live and celebrate our faith. So we brought people together from different communities and formed our own community, an open community.

Where do the members of the community (perhaps not all from this process of education to faith) come from?

In the two communities we currently have, the community members have mostly been leaders in the youth centre and have completed the Faith Education curriculum. Although it is true that we have two groups, one is mainly made up of this group or profile of young people, and the other is older, perhaps thirty... thirty years of age. What is true is that teachers and partners of some of the members have come together, making it a bit more heterogeneous, but in the end both have one goal, which is to continue to grow, and to grow as a community, as a community of faith.

What difficulties have you met along the way?

In a small city like Orense, where university students disappear from the city, a city with little industry and only services, very few people stay on and live here. So, we have to make do with the people who are in Orense and try to create ongoing communities even if their membership is in decline. But at least we offer them something.

What is the ultimate aim?

Well, one of the thoughts we had at the beginning, as a community, was that it was the first reference group that didn't have an expiry date. I think that's the main aim, not having an expiry date.

Why is it important to belong to a community?

Ultimately, faith is not lived alone. You can be physically alone at a given time, but spiritually you have to be in communion. Faith alone would be incoherent. It is very much congruent with the faith we have [to be in community]. So from this point of view it is important to be and feel part of a community.

What does accompanying a community mean for you?

The first thing that comes to my mind is that, for me, it is a gift from God. Because as a Salesian Cooperator I am in love with young people and I love being among all of you. You give me life, you give me joy, you give me hope. I cannot conceive of my life without you young people.

How is your relationship with the rest of the Salesian presence?

Well, each one of us has different links with the Salesian works we came from. We all feel part of the commitment that others have in each of the different places, but, well, we have people who are catechists, others who are Salesian Cooperators, people who are teachers in the different schools... Basically, well... we have multiple links, although it's not one link as a community, but we feel part of this link between all of us.

Santiago Garcia Mourelo:

In order to give this pastoral proposal of the Valdocco Community its driving force, two people from the provinces were asked to establish a working team at national level. This team consists of five people, and is made up of Salesians and Salesian Cooperators. Its fundamental mission is to fully develop the project, coordinate it in the provinces and to ensure the formation of community leaders. Alongside this national structure, the provinces have also developed (or will develop in the coming year) some very flexible structures: a community commission; a community committee (where all the communities in the province are represented); and a forum for those accompanying to share their experiences, hopes and expectations. At the beginning of the year, at national level, the first initial formation meeting for community accompaniers was offered. Most of Spain was represented and it turned out to be a very fruitful meeting, with people wanting much more. In March there will be another offering, a webinar, to pass on some content according to demand, and at the end of the course we want to offer a meeting based on experiences and therefore share this scene that is proving to be very promising and exciting.

The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit* as well as the final document of the “Synod on Young People” invite us to review the purpose of what we offer in pastoral terms, the choices we make, as well as the means we use.

Our Salesian Youth Ministry is very much reflected in this synodal process and in the directions that the Church wishes to promote to make young people fellow travellers and actively involved in evangelising work in today's society.

The *Valdocco* Communities are about helping to being this invitation to fulfilment.

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