

CEA YOUTH/VOCATION MINISTRY AND INITIAL FORMATION

MEETING IN ROME

The General House welcomed brothers from **France, Ireland-England, Poland and Iberia** to a meeting in Rome that took place from **7th – 11th January** this year 2014. The objective of the meeting was to reflect on reality of Youth/Vocation Ministry and Initial Formation.

The decision to hold such meeting was taken at the CEA when it met in May of last year in El Escorial. That decision resulted from a letter that had been submitted to CEA by the coordinator of Initial Formation who expressed his concern at the lack of brothers available to take part in such meetings. The CEA understood that this absence was due not to a lack of interest in initial Formation but rather to a lack of candidates for religious life.

This in turn highlighted the need to address **Youth/Vocation Ministry** in relation to **Initial Formation**. And so a meeting was convened to which those involved in Youth/Vocation Ministry and Initial Formation were invited, as were all Provincials in Europe in so far as they were able to attend.

The outcome was that **twelve** brothers met in the General House coming from the aforementioned Provinces: four coordinators of Youth-Vocation Ministry, four coordinators of Initial Formation and three Provincials. Also present at the meeting were three members of the General Government: Pankras, Camille and Felipe.

At the time of reflecting on the content and the atmosphere of the meeting, we felt it important to highlight the **hope** that this meeting evoked in us and thus we committed ourselves to transmitting that: the hope there are and there can be vocations in Europe. This is a *theological* hope, in that we believe that the Lord continues calling people and, in this way, we understand vocations as something which, above all, depends on Him. At the same time it is a *realistic* hope, knowing that in the present circumstances we do not expect large numbers, but rather persons who feel called to carry forward the charism of the Congregation at the service of Europe and the whole world.

We were fortunate to have the help of two Salesian religious: **Mario Oscar Llanos** and **Jesús Miguel Nuñez**. Their help was much appreciated not only for all that they shared with us, but also for how they helped us to communicate among ourselves.

One of the essential elements of this communication has been the importance of **being close to young people of Europe** who have their own unique characteristics that we need to get to know and which are more common among them than we might realise.

We need to be close to them in a positive, welcoming, faithful way - a closeness which in turn will demand of us many things. Young people who feel called today need to see that we are people who are rooted in faith, prayer, fraternity and community life.

Also seen as very important is the need for our community and Provincial structures to adapt themselves to youth/vocation ministry, if we want to commit to young people. There will be a need to think about 'pilot' communities in which young people can experience our life. Basically we are talking about creating and fostering a '**vocational culture**' in our communities and apostolic works. Ongoing Formation may be a major challenge here.

It has also become clear that our ministry is not just a question of organizing activities but rather finding ways **to be close to and accompany young people**. Such accompaniment will be more than an activity. It will require us to think about and prepare brothers who can be true 'teachers' in helping young people to learn how to move from just lived experiences to internalised experiences in a direct and clear evangelization. God loves us and calls everyone. This is a conviction that has to be very present in this process. The call can lead young people in diverse directions, and one of them may be a call to SSCC

It is these basic elements that we wish **to communicate to our Provinces**. At the same time we have seen that this theme can be very important in Europe – we only have to think of the Priority Project in Leuven. We believe it is important to continue speaking and reflecting together about all of this. There are Provinces who may have more resources than others, but together we want to move forward. As CEA it is worthwhile to note that perhaps the vitality of the Conference might come from a joining or pooling of efforts in the different areas: Youth-Vocation Ministry, Initial Formation, Ongoing Formation, Provincial Governments. Let us think and dream together about vocations in Europe.

The next **World Youth Day** could also be a moment for working together. We were very conscious, too, of the community in Picpus which is an important centre in Youth-Vocation Ministry.

We give **thanks to the community in the General House** for the excellent welcome; Javier, at the beginning of the meeting and Camille at the end of it both stressed how important it was for us to feel at home in our house and that they were very happy to have us. Thanks, to Pankras who worked very closely with Derek to coordinate the meeting and to Camille and Felipe who very generously helped us with translation, which in Europe is very important.