



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
ON THE OCCASION OF THE SECOND LATIN-AMERICAN
CONTINENTAL CONGRESS FOR VOCATIONS
[CARTAGO, 31 JANUARY - 5 FEBRUARY 2011]**

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

Dear Priests, Men and Women Religious and Lay Faithful,

It will soon be 17 years since the First Latin-American Continental Congress on Vocations, convoked by the Holy See in close collaboration with the Latin-American Episcopal Council and with the Latin-American Confederation of Religious. That event was an important opportunity to relaunch the pastoral care of vocations across the whole Continent. This Congress, which you are preparing to celebrate in the city of Cartago in Costa Rica, is an initiative of the Bishops in charge of the pastoral care of vocations in Latin-America and in the Caribbean with which it is desired to continue the journey already begun in the context of the great missionary drive promoted by the Fifth General Conference of the Latin-American Episcopate in Aparecida (*Final Document*, n. 548).

The great task of evangelization requires an ever greater number of people to respond generously to God's call and to make a lifelong commitment to the cause of the Gospel. More incisive missionary action will bring as a valuable result an increase in vocations of special consecration, besides strengthening Christian life in general. In a certain way, the abundance of vocations is an eloquent sign of ecclesial vitality, and of a strong experience of faith on the part of all the members of the People of God. The Church, in her innermost depths, has a vocational dimension which is already implicit in her etymological meaning: "assembly convoked" by God. Christian life in turn shares in this same vocational dimension which characterizes the Church. That "follow me", which Jesus addressed to the Apostles and which changed their lives for ever, resonates ever anew in every Christian's soul (*cf.* Mt 4:19).

At this second Congress whose theme is: "Master, in Your Name will I Cast my Nets" (*cf.* Lk 5:5), the various people who work in the field of the pastoral care of vocations of the Church in Latin-

America and in the Caribbean have come together with the aim of strengthening the vocations ministry so that the baptized accept their call to be disciples and missionaries of Christ in the present circumstances of these beloved lands. In this regard, the Second Vatican Council affirms that “the duty of fostering vocations falls on the whole Christian community, and they should discharge it principally by living full Christian lives” (*Optatam Totius*, n. 2). The pastoral care of vocations must be fully integrated into pastoral care in general with a far-reaching presence in all the established pastoral areas (cf. *Fifth General Conference, Aparecida, Final Document*, n. 314). Experience teaches us that wherever vocational pastoral care is well planned and is a constant practice, vocations are not lacking. God is generous, and the commitment to the pastoral care of vocations in all the particular Churches must be equally generous.

Among the many aspects which could be considered in order to foster vocations, I would like to stress the importance of care for the spiritual life. Vocations are not the result of a human project or a skilful organizational strategy. At their deepest level they are a gift of God, a mysterious and ineffable initiative of the Lord which enters a person’s life, attracting him with the beauty of his love and awakening as a result a total and definitive gift of self to this divine love (cf. Jn 15:9, 16).

It is always necessary to bear in mind the primacy of spiritual life as the basis of all pastoral planning. It is necessary to give the young generations the possibility of opening their hearts to a greater reality: to Christ, the only One who can give meaning and fullness to their lives. We must get the better of our self-sufficiency and turn humbly to the Lord, begging him to continue to call many. Yet at the same time, the strengthening of our spiritual life must bring us to conform ourselves increasingly to God’s will and to bear a clearer and more transparent witness of faith, hope and charity.

Of course, the personal and community witness of a life of friendship and intimacy with Christ, of a total and joyful gift of self to God, occupies a priority place in the work of vocations promotion. The faithful and joyful witness of one’s own vocation has been and is an excellent way to reawaken in many young people the desire to follow in the Lord’s footsteps. And this should be accompanied by the courage to propose with delicacy and respect, the possibility that God is calling them too. The divine vocation often makes headway through a human word or thanks to an atmosphere in which a lively faith can be perceived. Today, as always, young people “are sensitive to Christ’s call inviting them to follow him” (*Address at the inaugural session of the Fifth General Conference, Aparecida, 13 May 2007*). The world needs God and will therefore always need people who live for him and proclaim him to others (cf. *Letter to Seminarians*, 18 October 2010).

Concern about vocations has a special place in my heart and in my prayers. I therefore encourage you, dear brothers and sisters, to dedicate yourselves with all your strength and your talents to this exciting and urgent task for which the Lord will abundantly reward you. I implore upon the organizers and participants in this Congress the intercession of the Virgin Mary, a real model of a generous response to God’s initiative, and at the same time I impart to them a special Apostolic

Blessing.

From the Vatican, 24 January 2011

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana