

HOW CHRISTIAN LIVING EDUCATION AND SALESIAN YOUTH MOVEMENT IN ALL THEIR EDUCATIVE SETTINGS LEAD YOUNG PEOPLE TO A LIFE CHOICE

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The Christian Living Education (CLE) Program or Catechesis Program in the FMA schools in the Philippines is the teaching of religion concretized in the daily and lived in continuity through our Educating Communities and in the Salesian Youth Movement (SYM). This program was developed by the Catechesis Sector of the province based on our Educational Mission as FMA.

The said program “puts the education/formation of the young at the center, so that they can develop every dimension of their personality according to the plan of God in Christ and in docility to the Holy Spirit (GEM # 41).

For this reason the Catechesis Program was logically ordered to be consistent to this educational mission, developing a detailed fundamental structure of religious instruction grounded on Revelation and faith, in the Church with the “core content the Person of Christ” (CT # 5). It lays down an itinerary of formation of the faith in its essential dimensions of “believing”, “doing” and “trusting” with a clear and specific goal of accepting life as a Vocation.

The primary source of the faith content is the Word of God (Scriptures and Traditions) and from which flows the active dialogue with the daily life experiences of the young. Everyday life is seen as the privileged place of meeting with God, of living out the Gospel values, of vocational growth and of sharing joy and celebration.

The specific approach based on the New National Catechetical Directory of the Philippines (NNCDP) is applied to facilitate the communication of content and to assure its fruitfulness in the life of the young and of the Church.

“Integration Approach” is a methodology which is developed through the norms of “fidelity to God”, “fidelity to man”, and “fidelity to the Church” (NCDP # 413). An integrated religious education is a means “*to close the gap*” between Christian doctrine as taught and the ordinary life experience of the Filipino Catholics.

The CLE/Religion or the Catechesis Program follows the framework of a ground plan which uses the Doctrine-Moral-Worship (D-M-W) integration in structure, content, sources and objectives.

Since our Catechesis Program uses an integration approach, it fosters holistic formation of the young teaching them to live their lives according to God’s plan. They are helped to see their life experiences in the light of God’s Word, reflective and more discerning in their choices, ... has a preferential option for the poor, guided to choose a career not for their own profit but for the common good of others, practicing servant leadership and living the Gospel values radically in the footsteps of Jesus.

In view of a holistic formation of the person, the CLE/Catechesis Program includes components such as the Class Mass, Assembly Mass, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Marian devotion, Recollection, the annual Retreat, the Happy Death experience at the end of every lesson, Sharing on the Word of God, ...and their immersion in the outreach service program.

These are concrete “Christian experiences” that provide meaning to their day to day encounters (GEM # 87) and to their life as a whole.

The young are also helped to process their experiences and to share this among themselves.

After every outreach experience, they gather in small groups and as a class process

their experiences with their teacher/guide. And within that same week during their sharing of God's Word, the same CLE teacher facilitates the encounter of the young with Jesus and how they met Him during the outreach experience.

As the young person share their experiences with each other, they learn not only to listen to their own stories of encounter with Jesus but also listen to others and how Jesus has become alive in the lives of their fellow young person.

Similarly, during their one-on-one encounter with their CLE teacher/guide outside class hours i.e., during Salesian Assistance time at the playground or along the corridors or while waiting for their time to go home, these young people also learn how to listen to the different moments that comprise their day, ... how to listen to the voices that they hear from within and from the outside world that most often confuse them and learn to be attuned with the movements of their heart and where they are being led to. Slowly, the young person learns how to listen and discern and make good choices for himself/herself. Here we see the value of the presence of adults, as companions of the journey, in the ordinary moments of everyday life.

Pope Francis in his message to the 2018 World Day of vocations said that "we need, to learn how to listen carefully to Jesus' word and the story of his life and also to be attentive to the details of our own daily lives, in order to learn how to view things with the eyes of faith, and to keep ourselves open to the surprises of the Spirit".

Through the *outreach program*, the CLE/Catechesis Program provide venues for the young for "volunteerism"- "a strategy to educate to a culture of free giving and solidarity, to justice and peace, by offering their personal contribution to the transformation of society and to the realization of a citizenship based on solidarity" (GEM p. 66).

Together with our Educating Communities, venues for community and outreach services are created. These experiences provide meaning and purpose in the life of every young person taking part in them. Examples of these are: mangrove reforestation, teaching of catechesis in the public schools, gift-giving to the poor at Christmas, service in the oratory, joining VIDES-Philippines as junior members, taking part in the programs and activities prepared by the Educating Communities, young people are led to slowly discover their call and their missionary vocation in the Church.

Salesianity topics are also integrated into their CLE/Catechesis program according to the theme and topics per grade level and to the needs of the students. While integration is done, systematic development of the Salesianity theme and topics are observed.

"*To close the gap*" between Christian doctrine taught in class and the ordinary life experience of the Filipino Catholic, our young people are provided with concrete experiences in the Salesian Youth Groups in the SYM. Through the SYM, our young people are provided with the venue to experience carefully planned and designed programs and activities that would enable them to do something concrete in their life.

Mother Yvonne Reungoat in her Circular letter n. 980, said:

A favorable opportunity for the accompaniment of the young is the SYM. This year we celebrate the 30th anniversary of its birth as a world movement. We ask ourselves: does SYM offer the young an intense fraternal life, challenging spiritual journeys, meaningful service experiences, spaces for appropriate accompaniment, and competent people for discernment?

In all our educative settings (schools, oratories, hostels, centers for youth at risk, technical-vocational centers, and boarding school), young people freely join the groups and associations that comprise the SYM. Membership in these groups and associations is not part of the academic curriculum in the school, therefore the young people are not obliged to become members. However, 100% of these young people still choose to join them.

Their membership to the SYM has provided them countless opportunities for growth. The programs and activities have been carefully articulated and implemented in such a way that experiences meet the goals of our Youth Ministry in the province.

Through the weekly encounter of the Salesian Youth Groups (SYG), young people have been given the occasion not only to develop their skills and talents, their gifts and leadership potentials but most of all they have grown in knowing themselves better enabling them to give a concrete response to God who has loved them in so many ways.

The annual camps of the SYM has provided the young people venues for service as they immerse themselves to the different aspects of life. By living the Salesian Youth Spirituality (SYS), young people have been given a privileged space to encounter themselves, their God, and fellow young people. They were able to find the venues to serve, not only during exceptional moments like calamities and disasters which we always have in our country, but more so in the current political situation of our country.

Several of our past pupils have testified that their Christian formation through their CLE classes and the Salesian Youth Movement have empowered them to become protagonists in their own lives. They were enabled to seek for themselves the path God has chosen for them, in their own careers, in choosing a lifetime commitment, in the work they were called to serve.

In whatever walk of life, they found themselves in, these young people, our past pupils are proofs that indeed, our CLE/Catechesis program and our SYM encounters have made them who they are today, men and women with Christian conscience, spirituality and social responsibility.

The whole educational journey of the young person therefore is summed up in “forming good christians and honest citizens” of the church and of society today.

However, personal accompaniment on the part of the FMA and the lay mission partner is one big challenge that is being faced today. The FMA and the lay mission partner who spends more than 8 hours a day with the young person in school also needs personal accompaniment. Both need to learn how to accompany and how to

discern, in other words, they need a good guide who will teach them discernment while being accompanied.

Mother General Yvonne Reungoat said in her Circular letters, we cannot accompany young people if we ourselves have not been accompanied. Circular n. 904 states:

Accompaniment demands maturity and interior freedom, together with the awareness of being accompanied in the first person. In fact, no one can judge another if she herself does not feel accompanied. The 'yes' said daily to the Lord through human mediation, even when it is fragile and weak, makes us capable of accompanying others. It enables us to do freely, what charity demands (L 35, 3).

In the Philippines, our lay mission partners who are tasked to teach CLE and animate youth groups in the SYM are themselves young, ages between 20-35 years old. Most of them come from public schools where the teaching of religion is different from the way we do. These young lay mission partners are also confronted with the same situation as the young people they are accompanying.

They too are confronted with the lack of adult figures to accompany and guide them. It is only in our schools that they have experienced what it means to be accompanied and to be guided. Several of them also come from broken and hurting families, families tried by all sorts of poverty and suffering. They too need to learn how to read their life stories with that of Jesus' story in the Gospel.

They too need to listen to themselves and spend more time in prayer and reflection, in reading and listening to scriptures and the voice of the Holy Spirit that speaks from within.

They too are confronted by the globalized culture. They themselves are products of this culture. The challenge therefore of the FMA in schools is to accompany both the lay mission partner and the young to make good choices for themselves.

There is the ever-pressing challenge and the tall order to educate oneself and to accompany both the young and the lay mission partner to discover the beauty of their lives, to make good and positive choices for themselves in order to discover their life commitment.

In Circular n. 904 Mother General continues to say that

Reciprocal accompaniment is born of relational experiences marked by respect, care, involvement, and responsibility. It is based on a common project, elaborated, and assumed by all. It calls for limpid vision that permits us to see with Jesus' eyes, the possibility of change present in the other person. It implies awareness that our meeting has a goal and a direction: holiness according to the spirituality of the Preventive System. In our encounter with each other, we touch the threshold of the mystery, the very presence of God who dwells within us.

The FMA is tasked to grow in her reciprocal accompaniment. She too, needs a good guide to be able to grow in her capacity to discern and to accompany. Both the FMA and the lay mission partner need to continually seek God and a daily

conversion of mind, heart, attitudes and ways so as to be a credible presence among young people.

The call to be accompanied and to accompany is a lifetime challenge. As Mother General says in her Circular letter n. 909,

We must accompany the young in feeling their indebtedness toward life, helping them to discover meaning in their personal history, their experiences, their encounters, and their reality. Gratitude is the truest attitude in the face of a gift. If we do not feel gratitude toward those who have transmitted determined values, we will not feel obligated to transmit them to others.

Vocation or a lifetime commitment is not just the final moment of one's journey to maturity. It is a reality that characterizes every stage and every phase of development. It is therefore an imperative that the FMA and the lay mission partner be guided and accompanied very well so they can also accompany and guide the young entrusted to them.

Another challenge is the constancy and consistency of the daily Salesian Assistance (presence) and the friendly talk that the FMA and the lay mission partners do in the school to know better the young person in front of them. Due to the many concerns of the school, at times, the Salesian Assistance is the first to be set aside. The opportunity to encounter and have a friendly talk with the young person is lost. There is the need to remind the FMA, to educate and form the lay mission partners to a deeper understanding and importance of Salesian Assistance and the friendly talk.

I would like to recall here the words of Don Bosco in the famous Letter from Rome in the year 1884:

By a friendly relationship with the young, especially in recreation, affection can't be shown without this friendly relationship, and unless affection is seen there can be no confidence. He who wants to be loved must first show his own love. Our Lord made himself little with the little ones and bore our infirmities. He is our Master in this matter of the friendly approach. A master who is only seen in the master's chair is just a master and nothing more, but if he goes into recreation with the boys he becomes their brother.

Lastly, the FMA and the lay mission partner also needs to be mentored and coached on communication skills. They need to grow in their capacity to communicate the new languages of the young today.

