

# Supporting Volunteers in Youth Organizations

Kick-off meeting - 6th March 2021

## Josef DEBONO

Hello to everyone and thank you for dedicating time to be with us. I would like to especially thank Fr João for showing interest in what we are doing. For us, being an integral part of the Church's journey, is of utmost importance, and your vicinity and interest in our project encourages us to keep our eyes focused on our destination. I would also like to show gratitude to FIAC and its Youth Coordination that made this project possible and for embracing our ideas from the very beginning.

During these minutes I am going to give an overview of this project.

It all started because in Catholic Action we are blessed with people, like this special person over here, [PHOTO WITH ARROW ON MARIA GRAZIA] who are passionate about bringing people together. They believe, and this is my interpretation, that when people are together in a good environment, The Holy Spirit works through his infinite creativity.

Surely, an important moment in this new adventure was back in 2017 [SLIDE- CONGRESS-AC150] when some of us came together for the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Congress on Catholic Action and the celebrations of the 150 years of Azione Cattolica Italiana. That occasion helped us to become more aware of the universality of the Church and much more convinced that we needed to move on from "being together" to "being together to construct something together" [SLIDE- BEING TOGETHER...] or better, "being together to be A Church that goes forth". Surely, at that moment we couldn't even imagine where we would be at this stage. However, we were determined to dedicate energy to work together to discover what God wanted from our organisations.

Later in 2017, three organisations, namely AC Romania, Italia and Malta, through FIAC's support, had the opportunity to apply for funding within the Erasmus + programme of the European Union, and to do a project named OWLS [SLIDE- OWLS LOGO] At that time, bureaucratic issues stopped AC General of Spain to fully participate in this project.

OWLS was a 2-year project, with 5 distinct training seminars for youth leaders in our organisations, held between 2018 and 2019.

More than that, OWLS permitted many young people to come together [SLIDE- PHOTOS OWLS], to further appreciate the beauty of being missionaries in our Church, share many experiences and build relationships. [SLIDE- MORE PHOTOS OWLS] Above all, for us who were organising, OWLS was an opportunity to listen and learn about the hopes and concerns of the young people who participated.

[SLIDE- FEBRUARY 2019] In February 2019 we held a meeting in Malta to discuss how we could continue our collaboration within FIAC, beyond OWLS. During this meeting we learnt about and considered various opportunities, and we decided to meet again in October 2019 in Rome [SLIDE- OCTOBER 2019].

In this meeting we discussed the outcomes of OWLS, which finished in Summer 2019, and reflected on the needs of youth leaders and our organisations. By then, AC General was an active part in this partnership.

The October 2019 meeting, helped us to identify major questions which are of common concern to our four organisations [SLIDE- QUESTIONS]:

## Supporting Volunteers in Youth Organizations

Kick-off meeting - 6th March 2021

- 1) Why do young people, at a certain age, tend to quit their collaboration within the mission of our organisations?
- 2) Does this mean that they also stop their active involvement within the church and in the fostering of common good within our communities?
- 3) Are our organisations doing enough to help young people to acknowledge their calling to be missionary disciples? Are they accompanying them to continuously seek God's will in their lives?
- 4) Is there anything that our organisations can do to help young people be protagonists in the development of our organisations, for the benefit of the Church and our communities?

In light of *Christus Vivit*, [SLIDE-CHRISTUS VIVIT]: our discussion led us to conclude that rather than offering our young people “pre-packaged answers and ready-made solutions”, we needed to “allow their real questions to emerge and to face the challenges they pose” (CV65). Thus, we decided to embark on a vast research exercise to *listen* deeply to the hopes, concerns and needs of young people.

[SLIDE-2020] During 2020 we wrote a project proposal and submitted it for review to the Maltese National Agency responsible for Erasmus +. Our Strategic Partnership project was granted funding by the NA during summer 2020. It will be carried out within 30 months, between March 2021 and August 2023.

[SLIDE-A research...] The approximately €160,000 that we were granted will be used to conduct a research exercise with young people within the four organisations. Anthony will be our Research Coordinator and he will soon give more details about the research process.

[SLIDE-Intergenerational collaboration...] This project is also an opportunity for young people and adults who have experience in youth the youth field to collaborate, bringing together ideas, knowledge, different experiences and perspectives, expertise, and creativity.

[SLIDE-Roles] Emanuela is the project manager and is the person responsible for the general coordination of the project. Franziska, Andrea, Codruta and Fran are coordinating and facilitating the project activities in their respective countries.

[SLIDE-Data Collectors] Other people will be helping with the data collection for the research process. In September this year, Covid permitting, they are going to meet in Malta for a training seminar on data collection that will be facilitated by our Research Coordinator.

[SLIDE-Experts] 4 people who have vast experience in youth ministry within the four organisations will help the Research coordinator to contextualise the research.

[SLIDE-The way forward] Towards the end of the project, in 2023, around 35 young people and youth leaders from the four organisations will gather in Malta to analyse the findings of the research and start planning further initiatives to address its outcomes.

We are convinced that this project will help FIAC to further develop its contribution towards youth ministry and to actively engage more Catholic Action setups from other countries in a common effort to help young people understand God's will in their lives.

## **Supporting Volunteers in Youth Organizations**

**Kick-off meeting - 6th March 2021**

We are also convinced that this research will not only turn useful for youth ministry movements within the Church but will also contribute to the knowledge base of youth work at large.

Our final aim is to help as many people as possible to be open for an authentic relationship with God. This project is simply another small step in our discernment process as organisations within the Church. May the Holy Spirit guide us in this journey.