

▣ Builders of Hope ▣

Book 3

Acting Through History

Acting Through History Editorial Team

Builders of Hope

Book 1

In Covenant with God

Book 2

Followers of Jesus

Book 3

Acting Through History

Book 4

Committed as Church

Book 5

Fostering Culture and Society

Forjadores de Esperanza

Libro 1

En Alianza con Dios

Libro 2

Seguidores de Jesús

Libro 3

Activos en la Historia

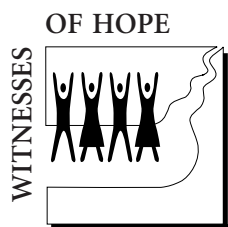
Libro 4



Comprometidos como Iglesia

Libro 5

Constructores de Cultura y Sociedad

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CONTENTS

Introduction 9

 Objectives 10

 Methodology 11

 Documents 13

 Appendices 13

 Process and scheduling 14

Initial Journey:

 The Life Project as the Path for Personal Realization . . . 16

 Session 1: Introduction and dedication 19

 Session 2: *Acting Through History* and its place
 in the Prophets of Hope model 21

 Session 3: God’s plan and the personal life project . . . 22

 Session 4: *Joven*, dare to be 23

 Session 5: Celebration of faith 24

 Session 6: Evaluation 28

Community Meeting 1:

 Introduction to the Discernment Process 29

First Step in the Discernment Process:

Placing Ourselves Before God 37

 Community Meeting 2:

 Prayer and the Openness to Do God’s Will 38

Second Step in the Discernment Process:

Becoming Aware of Our Being Christians in All Situations 47

 Community Meeting 3:

 Being a Person—A Task of a Lifetime 48

 Community Meeting 4:

 Knowing Ourselves in More Depth 55

 Community Meeting 5:

 Sexuality from a Christian Perspective 61

 Community Meeting 6:

 Challenges to a Christian Living of Sexuality 68

 Community Meeting 7: Evaluation of the First Cycle
 of Community Meetings 75

Third Step in the Discernment Process:

Analyzing Our Motivations, Alternatives, and Options 77

 Formation Workshop: Introduction to the Analysis
 of Motivations, Alternatives, and Options 78

 Session 1: Opening prayer 79

 Session 2: Our motivations in life 80

 Session 3: Choosing alternatives
 before an important decision 82

 Session 4: Celebration of faith 84

 Session 5: Evaluation 86

Fourth Step in the Discernment Process:

Integrating the Plan of Action into Our Personal Life Project 87

 Community Meeting 8:

 Letting Our “Yes” Be “Yes” and Our “No” Be “No” 88

 Community Meeting 9:

 Work and Our Human Vocation 97

 Community Meeting 10: How Our Thirst for God
 Prompts Us to Act Through History 104

Fifth Step in the Discernment Process:

Evaluating Our Decisions from a Christian Perspective . . . 111

 Community Meeting 11: The Importance of Confirming
 an Option in the Life Project 112

 Community Meeting 12:
 Evaluation of the Second Cycle of Community Meetings 118

Retreat:

 The Life Project as the Path to Personal Realization . . . 120

Session 1: Opening prayer	122
Session 2: God's revelation of himself in us	123
Session 3: Penitential rite and celebration of God's gifts	126
Session 4: Foundations of our life	127
Session 5: Creed about our vocation, mission, and gifts	128
Session 6: Review of our mission as prophets of hope acting through history	129
Session 7: Vision and planning for our personal future	132
Session 8: Eucharistic liturgy and rite of commissioning	133
Session 9: Evaluation	134
Document 1: The Personal Diary and an Examination of Life	135
Document 2: The Life Project and Our Personal Mission	141
Document 3: Called to Excel and to Be Prophets of Hope	147
Document 4: The Christian Vision of Human Sexuality	154
Document 5: Love, Sexuality, and Human Intimacy	161
Document 6: Society's Challenges to Our Christian Living of Sexuality	169
Document 7: A Process for Choosing the Best Alternative Before an Important Decision	178
Document 8: How Longings Inspire People to Act Through History	184
Document 9: A Process for Evaluating Our Decisions from a Christian Perspective	193
Appendix 1: Evaluation Forms	198
Appendix 2: Witnesses of Hope Collection	204
Glossary	206
Notes	211

INTRODUCTION

Acting Through History is the third book of the Builders of Hope series. This series was written to promote the development of the vocation of **jóvenes*** as **laypeople** in the church and society. Although it was designed for evangelizing and missionary communities according to the Prophets of Hope model (see volume 3 of the Prophets of Hope series, *The Prophets of Hope Model: A Weekend Workshop*), this series can easily be adapted for other pastoral models. *Acting Through History* is intended for participants eighteen years and older who have gone through a sound process of formation in the faith and have developed a solid spirituality.

Acting Through History leads participants to discover their personal vocation and to begin to formulate a personal **life project**. It does this by helping them to know themselves better, to analyze the reality in which they live, and to reflect on their mission in history. The process proposed by this book is guided by a noble and great ideal placed before humankind: the ideal of the Gospel. The ultimate guide is Christ, who is alive and present in small communities of *jóvenes*. He will help shape and transform into reality the life project of *jóvenes* who want to pursue their personal vocation and to take control of their life freely and passionately. Mary, God's great collaborator in the history of salvation, will be their constant companion, a teacher who shows the way to Jesus, and a model of how to be active builders of their own history and coprotagonists with God in the history of humankind.

If you are implementing the Prophets of Hope model, it is suggested that you use this book after completing the following books in the Witnesses of Hope collection, in the order stated here:

*The first time any special term appears, it is presented in boldfaced type. Definitions can be found in the glossary. We suggest that before reading the book, you review the glossary to acquaint yourself with this vocabulary. We also recommend that persons responsible for coordinating and facilitating the meetings carefully study any special terminology used.

- *Dawn on the Horizon: Creating Small Communities*, which helps *jóvenes* to create a small community and to become aware of the relation between their faith, their lives, and their experience as an ecclesial community
- *In Covenant with God*, which facilitates their reflection on their baptismal covenant and on their mission in the world and in the history of salvation
- *Followers of Jesus*, which helps them to know Jesus better and motivates them to assume the mission of making the Reign of God present in the world

These three books help members of the small community to situate themselves in God's plan as they acquire a broader and more profound vision of their vocation and of their Christian mission. With that vision as a basis, *Acting Through History* offers participants the opportunity to carry out a process of discernment that helps them to see their life in a new way and to discover or clarify their personal life project.

The last two books of the Builders of Hope series, *Committed as Church* and *Fostering Culture and Society*, will help participants discern God's call to serve as members of the church and of the society in which they live. *Leaven in the World: Growing in Community Life*, from the Agents of Hope series, leads the participants to look deeply into the life and mission of their small community and to strengthen their mutual trust. For a complete view of the Witnesses of Hope collection and of the specific place of each series and each book within the collection, see appendix 2.

Objectives

The goal of *Acting Through History* is to help young adults to be responsible for their own history and for the direction of their life. This book presents a theoretical and practical framework for discerning God's special call, formulating a life project, and developing a spirituality. The process of the book provides participants with an in-depth formation that will enable them to follow God's call to be artisans of a new Christian order in society. To achieve its goal, *Acting Through History* proposes the following objectives for participants:

- To share their life experiences, challenges, concerns, and ideals with their small community and to use the knowledge they gain to guide and support one another in terms of their individual circumstances
- To formulate their life project by discerning God's call and using a personal diary to help them know themselves better, to become more aware of their reality, and to follow God's call
- To integrate the Gospel and the values of God's Reign in the society in which they live, by their lifestyle and their experience as a community, as leaders, and as prophets
- To rely on Mary, the model disciple, as their special companion during this stage of formation

Methodology

Like the rest of the books in the Builders of Hope series, *Acting Through History* follows a methodology based on an integral perspective of *jóvenes*. In contrast with the previous books in the series, which focus on the content of our faith and on reflection about life in the light of that content, this book gradually develops an emphasis on reflection in community on *jóvenes* as subjects of their own history. The later books, *Committed as Church* and *Fostering Culture and Society*, will help *jóvenes* complete the formulation of their life project, which is one product of that communitarian reflection.

Personal work during the meetings and, above all, between meetings is essential to the process presented by this book. The community plays an important supporting role. However, the most significant task falls on each young person in particular. That is why all participants are asked to keep a personal diary and use it to reflect on their life.

Description of the five modules

The modules in *Acting Through History* are described below.

Module 1: The initial journey

The initial journey helps participants see the importance of the personal life project and teaches them to keep a personal diary. It offers them a broader experience than that of their small community,

and it helps them enter the formation stage that they are starting with this book. The instructions for preparing for this journey are found on pages 18–19.

Modules 2 and 4: The cycles of community meetings

The community meetings facilitate the process of Christian formation in community and help participants discern their vocation and personal mission. Two cycles of meetings, plus a formation workshop and a retreat, follow the steps of the discernment process, which are as follows: (1) placing ourselves before God; (2) becoming aware of our being Christians in all situations; (3) analyzing our motivations, alternatives, and options; (4) integrating the plan of action into our personal life project; and (5) evaluating our decisions from a Christian perspective.

The material for each meeting can be covered in one or several sessions, depending on the situation of the community. The important point is to promote a profound reflection and an enriching dialog that enables participants to look deeply into the meaning of their life. The material in this book should be adapted as necessary to maintain the spirit of the meetings and allow important conversations among participants. In addition to focusing on themselves at this stage of formation, participants should be concerned about the life of the community and their **Christian praxis** in society and in the church. Therefore, in addition to dialog on each individual's personal life, there should always be time to talk about the life and actions of the community.

Module 3: The formation workshop

The formation workshop is planned for an entire day. It is advisable to have a good process facilitator help with this component.

Module 5: The retreat

The retreat helps participants take a significant step in formulating their life project and devising a plan of action to make it a reality. In addition, it celebrates their passage to the next formation stage. It is recommended that *jóvenes* from several small communities at the same formation stage participate together in the retreat in order to have a broader ecclesial experience. The retreat is planned for a weekend, but it can be adapted to be done in one day.

Documents

Acting Through History contains two types of documents: (1) informative articles whose contents provide explanation and in-depth exploration of the themes studied in the community processes, and (2) instruments of reflection that may be used on different occasions throughout life. It is recommended that participants write their responses to those reflections in their personal diary rather than in the documents, so that the documents can be used on other occasions.

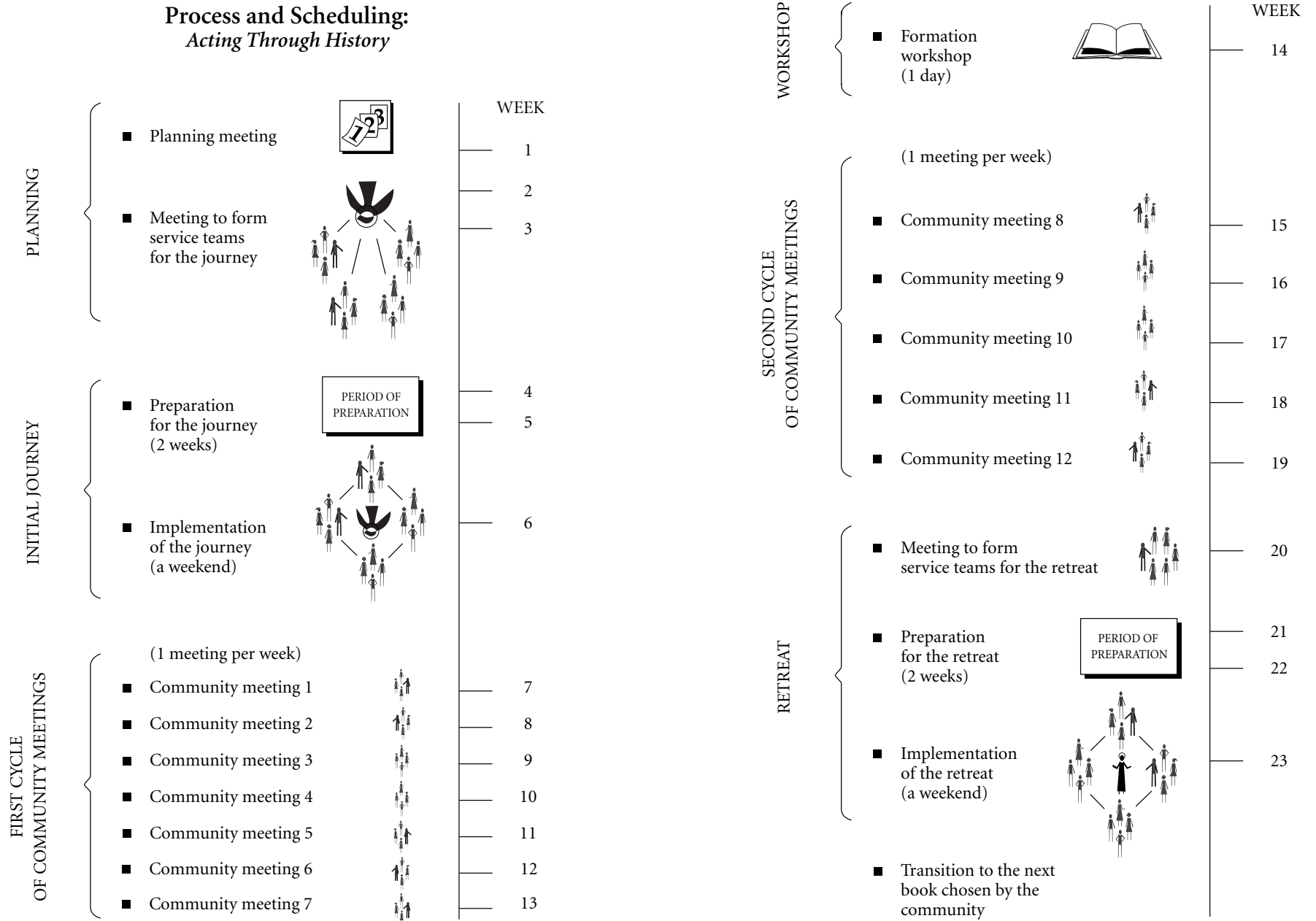
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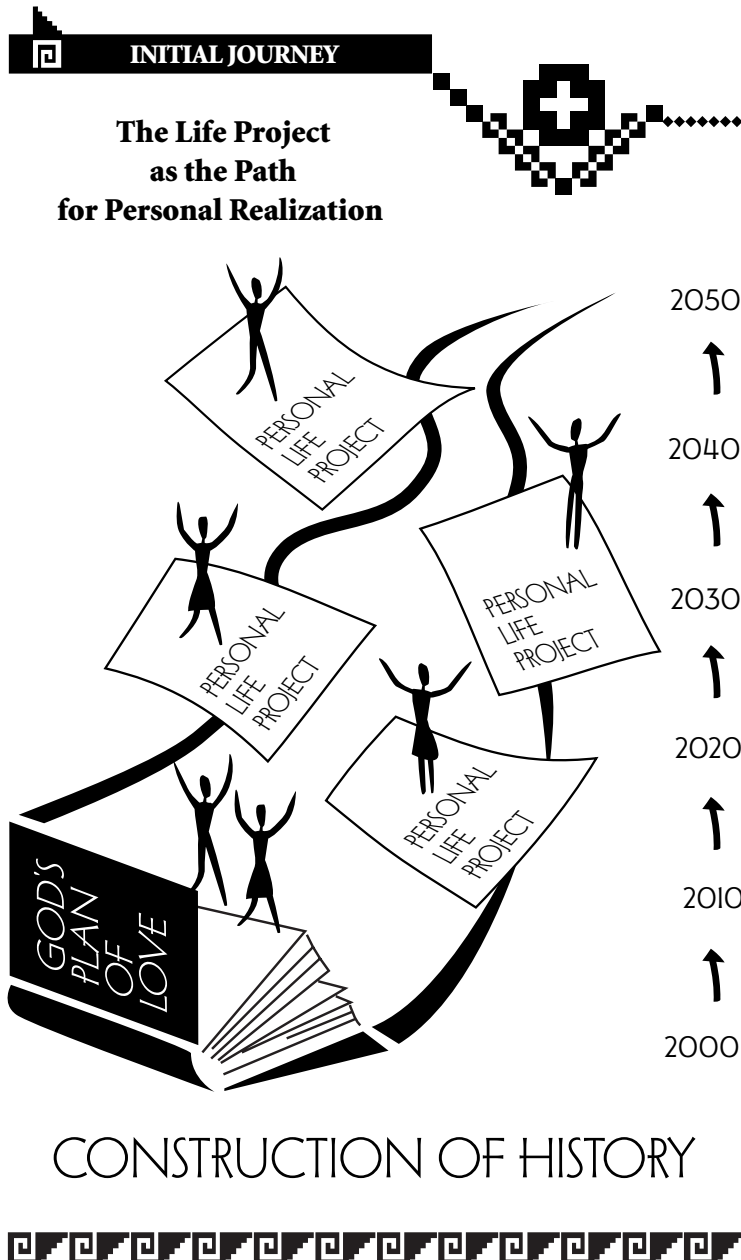
Appendix 1, “Evaluation Forms,” offers sample formats for preparing separate evaluations for the initial journey, the formation workshop, and the retreat. Those evaluations are important for helping the community recognize the contributions made by each component of the process, for identifying aspects of the process that need improvement, and for fostering the maturation of the participants and of the small community. Note that in contrast with the first two books in this series, this one does not provide forms for evaluating the community meetings. Instead, it relates the evaluation of the meetings to the discernment process, as explained in community meetings 7 and 12.

Appendix 2 is a chart of the Witnesses of Hope collection. This chart presents the different series in the collection and explains each book's objectives and place in the Prophets of Hope process.

Note. The books of this series present the material needed to develop the initial journey, the community meetings, the formation workshop, and the retreat, in keeping with the Prophets of Hope methodology. *Jóvenes* will need other resources to develop warm-up exercises, organized games, and songs for the meetings.

Process and Scheduling: *Acting Through History*





OBJECTIVES:

- To articulate the experience lived in the previous stages of formation as the foundation for the present stage
- To learn what the personal life project involves and visualize it as part of God's plan for humankind
- To discuss the personal diary, learn how to use it, and commit to writing it
- To invite Mary to be a companion and teacher in the realization of the personal life project

Program

Welcome, registration, songs or a warm-up activity, and refreshments (45 minutes)

Session 1: Introduction and dedication (3 hours)

- A. Introduction to the initial journey and to the personal diary
- B. Dedication of the initial journey to the Virgin Mary
- C. Reflection on the journey of life

Session 2: Acting Through History and its place in the Prophets of Hope model (1 hour)

Session 3: God's plan and the personal life project (4 hours)

- A. God's plan for humankind
- B. The personal life project as a page of God's plan
- C. Reflection on the personal life project

Session 4: Joven, dare to be (2 hours, 30 minutes)

Session 5: Celebration of faith (1 hour, 30 minutes)

- A. Sociodrama
- B. Prayer
- C. Meditation

Session 6: Evaluation (45 minutes)

Preparation

The initial journey is planned to take place during a weekend and to involve several communities that are starting this formation stage in a parish, diocese, or region. If it takes place in one day, it needs to be adapted. To prepare for the journey, complete the following procedure:

1. Planning meeting. The coordinating team, made up of the advisers, the *animadores*, and the community delegates, gathers to plan the initial journey. This meeting should be held at least one month before the initial journey.

2. Meeting to form the service teams. The coordinating team and the members of the various communities get together at least two weeks before the initial journey to form seven service teams. The following is a list of the teams and their responsibilities:

- *The coordinating team* is responsible for the overall process of the initial journey.
- *The team of presenters and facilitators* is responsible for the different sessions.
- *The logistics team* is responsible for the facilities, the schedule, the meals, and all that concerns good order.
- *The pep team* is responsible for hospitality, games, and songs.
- *The liturgy team* is responsible for prayer and liturgical celebrations.
- *The drama team* is responsible for the skits.
- *The evaluation team* is responsible for conducting and analyzing the evaluations.

It is important for *every person* who attends the initial journey to take part as a member of one of the service teams. Once the teams are formed, the members of each team select a coordinator. This person is responsible for guiding the service team during the creation of a working plan and calendar, and for ensuring that the team members are prepared for, and take an active role in, the initial journey.

3. Preparation of the teams. Each team holds the meetings it needs to prepare the service it will provide during the initial journey, according to the work plan and the calendar. For a detailed discussion of the functions of the teams, see manual 2 of the Agents of

Hope series, *Leaven in the World: Growing in Community Life*, pages 153–156.

4. Coordination meeting. The week before the initial journey, a meeting should be held to coordinate the service teams and to make any necessary adjustments in the program. People attending the meeting include the coordinating team, the coordinators of the service teams, the *animadores*, and the community delegates who attended the planning meeting.

Note. Because the personal diary is indispensable in the process presented in this book, it is recommended that the coordinating team buy notebooks to be handed out, one to each participant, at the first session of the initial journey.



Session 1: Introduction and dedication

Preparation. A facilitator from the presenters and facilitators team prepares a presentation of document 1, “The Personal Diary and an Examination of Life,” on pages 135–140. One person from the liturgy team brings the necessary objects for setting up an altar, including an image of Mary and some flowers.

A. Introduction to the initial journey and to the personal diary

1. The facilitator starts with an official welcome. Then she or he introduces the process to be followed in the initial journey, as outlined in the preceding preparation section of the journey, on pages 18–19.

2. The community examines document 1 in the following way:
- The facilitator reads the document aloud, inviting the participants to review it as it is being presented.
 - In groups of three, the community members discuss the importance of keeping a personal diary during the *Acting Through History* process.

B. Dedication of the initial journey to the Virgin Mary

1. The person from the liturgy team who is responsible for this prayer dedicates the initial journey to the Virgin Mary and invites her to accompany each participant during this formation stage.

2. The participants sing a song to Mary.

3. In a procession, the participants go to the altar, where everyone receives a personal diary. A person hands out the diaries, saying to each recipient in turn, “In the name of God, receive this instrument so that you may be a prophet of hope, acting through today’s history.” The recipient responds: “Thank you. I am ready to look deeply into what God wants from me.”

C. Reflection on the journey of life

1. The facilitator asks the participants to form pairs and to interview their partner using these questions:

- What great ideals do you have for your life? Think about the personal, family, social, professional, civic, and religious aspects of your life.
- What goals do you need to have for the next ten years in order to journey toward those ideals?

2. The facilitator gives the following directions for completing a personal reflection in the personal diary. He or she tells the participants to leave the first page of the journal blank, as they will need it at the end of the initial journey.

- Draw a path on the next two open pages of the diary. At the beginning of the road, draw yourself and write a few words or symbols indicating some important aspect of your personal identity and your history. Draw Mary at your side to indicate that she is your companion in life.
- Recall the ideals and goals that you shared with your partner. Write your strongest ideals at the end of the road, and the goals that will lead you to them at the midway point.
- Invite Mary to enlighten you with her wisdom as Jesus’ mother and disciple. Think of some objectives that will help you reach your goals. Formulate these as *actions you have to accomplish* and *habits you have to reject*.

- On the first part of the path, draw open *arrows* and write in each one an action you have to accomplish. Also draw *billboards* and write in each one a habit you have to reject.

3. The partners share their reflections with each other. They help each other to see if there is consistency between their ideals, their goals, and their actions to accomplish and habits to reject.

4. The community concludes with the song it sang in the dedication to Mary (see activity B, step 2).

Session 2: *Acting Through History* and its place in the Prophets of Hope model

Preparation. The coordinating team organizes a panel of four people to present a summary of the formation stages accomplished until now: creating the small community, living in covenant with God, following Jesus, and growing in community life as leaven in the world. Each panelist will give a 5-minute presentation of the main goals and characteristics of one formation stage. In preparation, each panelist should read the introduction of this book and go over the Witnesses of Hope book corresponding to her or his stage. (The introduction of this book lists the books corresponding to the different stages.)

The coordinating team selects a different person to prepare a presentation of *Acting Through History*. This person should study the book’s introduction and go over the whole book to identify its most important aspects.

1. The facilitator introduces the panel, and the panel presents its summary.

2. The participants gather in small groups, and each person shares the most important fruits that he or she obtained at each formation stage. One participant in each group takes notes on common experiences and on significant changes in the lives of the group members. If some people have not gone through all the stages as part of a community in the Prophets of Hope model, they should speak of their own experiences in those dimensions of Christian life.

3. The participants regather in the large group, and continue as follows:

- The facilitator asks the members of one small group to share what they found in common and write it on newsprint. Then the facilitator asks the other groups to add to the list in turn.
- The facilitator invites a few community members to give testimonies of significant changes they have experienced in their lives. The testimonies should address two questions: What were the changes? and What motivated those changes?

4. The person who prepared the summary of *Acting Through History* presents its goals and how they relate to the formation process followed up to now by the participants.

Session 3: God's plan and the personal life project

A. God's plan for humankind

Preparation. The facilitator brings paper, markers, newspapers, magazines, scissors, and glue for charts to be created in small groups.

1. In the same small groups from session 2, the participants specify what they understand to be God's plan for humankind according to what is revealed in the Bible.

2. On newsprint, each small group makes a chart of God's plan for the present, using drawings, and writings, and clippings from newspapers and magazines. The group includes the following elements:

- a sentence summarizing God's plan
- aspects of the present reality that are consonant with God's plan
- aspects of the present reality that are opposed to God's plan

3. Each small group brainstorms the most important actions that Christian *jóvenes* have to undertake in order to help actualize God's plan today, especially among young adults.

4. Each small group reflects about the ideas that it came up with, addressing these questions and tasks:

- Is something important missing? If so, add it.
- What actions are essential or most urgent? Mark them.

- How have you been helping to accomplish God's plan? Make a list of your contributions.

5. The large group again assembles, and each small group presents its drawing and its list of contributions to God's plan.

B. The personal life project as a page of God's plan

Preparation. This activity is based on document 2, "The Life Project and Our Personal Mission," on pages 141–146. It is suggested that two people present it together and use visual material.

1. The presenters explain how the personal life project is part of God's plan for humankind revealed in the sacred Scriptures.

2. The presenters show how the discernment process relates to the personal life project and to God's plan.

C. Reflection on the personal life project

1. This exercise should be done in a spirit of meditation. The participants begin by each finding a place where they can meditate in silence.

2. The participants individually and silently read document 2. They write in their personal diary the answers to the questions that are posed there. These notes will be used for a reflection during the celebration of faith in session 5 of this initial journey.

Session 4: *Joven, dare to be*

1. The facilitator explains that in this session, the community will prepare three lyrical pieces, each in the form of a poem, a *corrido* (musical poem), a *bomba* (popular, humorous song of rhymed verse), an *aguinaldo* (poem sung to Puerto Rican music), a salsa or rap song, or some other genre pertaining to the culture of the participants.

2. The facilitator asks the participants to form three groups and assigns one of the following themes to each group:

- "*Joven, dare to be a person.*"

- “*Joven*, always renew yourself.”
- “*Joven*, the world and history are in your hands.”

3. The small groups proceed as follows:

- Each group chooses a lyrical form to work with and breaks up into teams of four or five persons.
- Each team composes one or two verses, drawing its inspiration from its reflections during the preceding sessions of the initial journey.
- Each group regathers and organizes its teams’ verses to make up its lyrical piece.

4. In a large-group session, the small groups share and celebrate what they have composed.

Note. Subsequently, some people could develop this work into a well-integrated song or other lyrical piece, and submit it for publication to Instituto Fe y Vida, 1737 West Benjamin Hold Drive, Stockton, CA 95207-3422.

Session 5: Celebration of faith

Preparation. The facilitator brings a large image of Mary for the skit. She or he also brings small pictures of the Virgin Mary, with a commemorative message of the initial journey written on the back, one for each participant.

The drama team prepares a skit and a prayer based on the following ideas. It is recommended that the skit be performed in the regular meeting room for the initial journey, and the prayer in a chapel or another special place.

The facilitator makes a poster displaying the group response for activity B, step 4, of this session, and posts it in the prayer space where all will be able to see it.

A. Sociodrama

[The community members sit as they do for a community meeting. They leave one empty seat.]

Luis: I have realized that if we think positively and do what we want, we can acquire a strong personality. This is why I constantly tell

myself: “I do what I want,” “No one gives me orders,” “I am the one who chooses,” and “I am free, I am of age, I am not a child.”

Eddy: I believe that doing what we want has nothing to do with having a strong personality. It is rather the opposite. We often allow ourselves to be manipulated by our own passions, our temperament, our psychological complexes—

Lupe: I agree with Eddy. In addition, many times, we are like pawns in the hands of fashion and propaganda. We say that we do what we want, but we are only copying what others are doing.

Rosi: I thought we were talking about our personal life projects rather than about doing what we feel like doing. And in this, Mary’s example can help us.

Gabi: That sounds good but impractical. Nobody can follow Mary’s example.

Luis: That’s what I think. Mary was destined to be Jesus’ mother, and she had all the support from God for that.

Rosi: That is precisely the point. We all have a special vocation and a personal mission. And we can also rely on God’s support—

Luis: Good, that proves my point! Mary needed a strong personality to be able to do what God wanted from her. That is the only way she could do what she did! Remaining a virgin! How difficult!

Rosi: Of course it was difficult! But someone once explained to me that as a young girl, Mary put her life in God’s hands. She trusted God totally, and she felt completely happy to do God’s will. Because of that and because God especially chose her, she was able to accept and respond to God’s request that she be the mother of his Son.

Gabi: In any case, it is impossible to imitate her. Which one of us would ever believe that we would get pregnant by the work of the Holy Spirit and that our boyfriend would understand and marry us? Besides, men *couldn’t* even believe that!

Eddy: Wait! Don’t take things so literally! Nobody is saying that! Jesus’ Incarnation in Mary is a mystery. But how God uses us to make Jesus present wherever we are is just as mysterious.

Lupe: Here we go again, changing the subject. We were talking about how to form a strong personality and about the personal life project.

Rosi: Of course! That is why we have to focus on Mary. When she realized what God was asking of her, she put herself in his

hands, and so she was able to face the mystery that was presented to her and to do what she had to do. That is why I call her María del Sí and ask her to help me say “yes” to God. I invite all of you to dialog a little with her so that we may be able to discover our vocation and to carry out the project that God has for us.

[A couple—a young man and a young woman—stand up and bring Mary’s image to the group. The couple place the image on the empty seat.]

Lupe: *[Stands up]* Welcome, María del Sí! You have a lot to teach us. We say “yes” to so many worthless things . . . Teach us to say “yes” to what is worthwhile, and to say “yes” to God, who loves us.

Rosi: I would like us to talk a little bit longer with María del Sí before we go to the place of prayer. What do you each want to tell her?

[Each participant in the skit expresses to Mary an idea, a question, a petition, or whatever. When all have had a turn, the same people who brought the image of Mary to the group pick it up, and they lead a procession of the community to the prayer place. On the way, they sing to Mary.]

B. Prayer

When the community arrives in the prayer place, the leaders of the procession place the image of Mary on the altar adorned with flowers. The actors from the skit facilitate the prayer.

1. A facilitator offers the following introduction:

This initial journey has been like the visit of the angel who told Mary what God wanted from her. We have seen how God has been preparing us so that we can visualize the project of our life as an important part of God’s loving plan for humankind. We want to hear God’s call and respond “yes,” as Mary did. This stage of formation that we have initiated today will help us to do that.

2. One person proclaims Luke 1:26–38.

3. A facilitator invites all the participants to
- offer a personal prayer asking God to indicate what he wants the most from them during this stage of life (The facilitator allows a few minutes of silence for this prayer.)
 - ask Mary to teach them to say “yes,” not only in words but rather with their whole lives
 - each pray aloud if they so desire (After each prayer, all respond, “Mary, help us to give God a free and committed ‘yes.’”)

4. A facilitator introduces the Magnificat by stating that the universal church uses this canticle of Mary to give thanks to God for loving humankind. Then the facilitator invites the participants to stand up and explains that as the Magnificat is read, they are to respond to each verse, in a joyful voice: “The Lord has done great things for us! The Lord has looked with favor on our lowliness! With Mary, let us give thanks to God!” The facilitator points out the poster with these words for their reference.

Two persons proclaim the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55), taking turns reading the verses. Another person guides the participants in their response. It is recommended that both readers use the same version of the Bible.

C. Meditation

1. The facilitator explains that the community will now share a meditation in the style of Mary’s Magnificat, keeping in mind their reflections on document 2, “The Life Project and Our Personal Mission,” from session 3 of this initial journey. Each participant is to write and complete the following statements in his or her personal diary, as they are read aloud. The facilitator then reads the statements, giving sufficient time after each one for the participants to reflect and write.

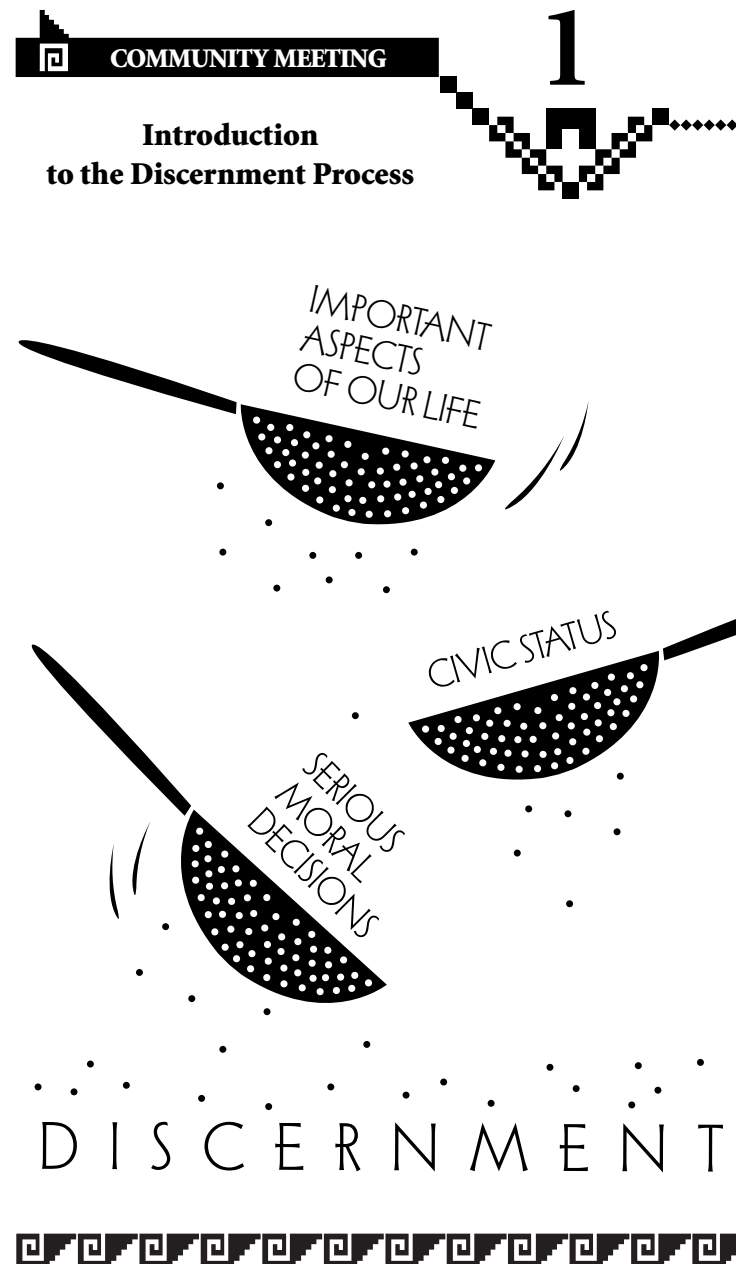
- My soul magnifies the Lord for . . .
- From now on, all will call me blessed because I became aware of . . .
- God has acted marvelously in my life by . . .
- I have heard God’s call to . . .
- I know that God is taking me by the hand so that I can follow his call and, like Mary, say “yes” to the Lord. The “yes” that I want to give to God is . . .

2. Each participant writes and draws something significant to his or her life project on the first page of his or her diary in order to personalize it.

3. The community sings to Mary again. The facilitator gives each participant a small picture of the Virgin Mary with a commemorative message on the back.

Session 6: Evaluation

The participants complete a written evaluation using form 1, on pages 198–199, in appendix 1, “Evaluation Forms.” This form may be photocopied and duplicated. The participants spend 20 minutes filling out the written portion of the evaluation. Then they spend 25 minutes sharing their responses.



OBJECTIVES:

- To gain a general idea of the Christian discernment process and the steps in a good discernment process
- To become aware of the decision-making process that we use in daily life and when facing important decisions, as well as the consequences of our way of deciding

Opening prayer

The facilitator invites the participants to pray as follows: At the end, anyone who so desires may pray out loud. All respond to the individual prayer, “Hear our prayer!”

Lord Jesus, as prophets of hope in this world, where hope is at times lacking, we want to tell you that we believe in you and in your message of life. Like you, we want to do God’s will and to fulfill our mission. Help us discern your ways. Jesus, tell us: What do you want from us? Where and how can we realize our full potential as we serve you?

Commentaries to help us be responsible for our history

Commentary 1:

Personal experience with decision-making processes

Every day and at all times, we have to make decisions. Not all the decisions have the same weight or influence our life in the same manner. This commentary is designed to help us reflect on our experience with decision-making processes. Doing so can help us become aware of our tendency to decide by ourselves or to let other people decide for us.

People who want to develop their potential and fulfill their vocation must learn to decide for themselves. Although it is true that we should seek the advice and support of other people when making important decisions, it is also true that as young adults, we should actually make those decisions ourselves. That is the only way we can exercise the freedom for which we were created and can assume responsibility for our own life.

Reflection in community

1. The facilitator invites the participants to think of a decision in their *daily life* that someone else made for them, and to answer the following questions:

- When did you realize that someone else had made that decision?
- What feelings did that awareness awaken in you?
- What were the repercussions of your not making that decision?

2. The community members share the experiences that they recalled and discuss the consequences of someone else’s having made their decisions.

3. In pairs, the participants discuss and analyze a decision of *significant consequence* that they have made, as follows:

- Each partner shares such a decision, stating what it involved and the process that was followed to make it. Both partners listen to each other without interrupting. They may take notes to help themselves analyze the other person’s decision.
- Each person analyzes the decision shared by her or his partner: Did the partner decide alone or with someone’s help? Did the partner decide freely and consciously? Was the partner manipulated by someone or by circumstances? Did she or he copy what other people had done or said? If anyone does not have enough information to do the analysis, they should ask their partner for more.

Commentary 2: How ongoing dialog with God helps us discern the road to authentic happiness

Caring people try to make decisions in the best possible way by taking into account all the variables affecting the decisions. In addition to using human wisdom, we Christians take into account the will of God; we look at the alternatives through the eyes of faith in order to see our life in the light of the word of God.

God's call to each person is unique. We all find ourselves in different situations, and we all have our own history, personality, temperament, and gifts. This is why each person needs to discern how to adopt the lifestyle that God wants for her or him; to identify what is wrong; to choose between what is good and better; and to accept a lesser evil when there are no better alternatives.

The word *discern* comes from the Latin *discernere*, which means “to separate” or “to distinguish.” In this discussion, to discern means to study and analyze what is going on around us, and within us, in order to find elements that may help us discover God's plan for us. Christian discernment is a reflection process that allows us to assess important situations in order to act as Jesus did. This is not easy—and it never has been. Jesus faced complex situations, and he had to take time and space to reflect about them. For example, before selecting the Apostles, he spent a night praying over his decision (see Luke 6:12–13).

Discernment helps us to discover what God wants from us, especially when we are making important and major decisions. Making daily decisions in the light of the Gospel prepares us to make good decisions at crucial times. Christian discernment is rooted in our faith in a God who loves us unconditionally and who wants us to have life in abundance; a God who has showered us with gifts and who calls us to live with the freedom of being his sons and daughters. This God shows us the road to authentic happiness through his Son, Jesus, and accompanies us through his Spirit.

When we face significant life decisions, we need to undertake a thorough discernment process. Those decisions may be either permanent or temporary. If they are permanent, they require greater discernment, and we may need months of reflection to choose wisely. Among significant decisions, the following types stand out:

- *decisions about important aspects of life*—for example, choosing a **novio/a**, whether to get married now or to wait, what country to live in, what career to pursue, whether to live close to or far from our parents, and whether to accept or reject a job promotion that requires living alone or in another state
- *decisions about one's state of life*—that is, choosing to marry, to join the priesthood or live a **consecrated life**, or to remain single
- *serious moral decisions*—for example, choosing whether to participate in drug trade or other illicit economic activity, or whether to

take a person off life support after she or he has been in a coma for a long time

Reflection in community

The participants share a few examples of significant decisions they have recently made after considering the alternatives in the light of the Gospel.

Commentary 3:

The discernment process in *Acting Through History*

Recall that the goal of this book is to help young adults to be responsible for their own history and for the direction of their life. To achieve that goal, it offers a series of techniques and reflections to be used in discerning different aspects of life. These techniques and reflections correspond to the steps of a good discernment process, and they can be used throughout life.

The five steps of the discernment process used in this book are as follows:

**1 Placing ourselves before God**

Community meeting 2 explains what this step is about and how to do it.

**2 Becoming aware of our being Christian in all situations**

Community meetings 3, 4, 5, and 6 help us understand ourselves as Christians.

**3 Analyzing our motivations, alternatives, and options**

The formation workshop and document 7, A Process for Choosing the Best Alternative Before an Important Decision, on pages 178—183, provide some tools to help us analyze the alternatives before us.

**4 Integrating the plan of action into our personal life project**

Community meetings 8, 9, and 10 and the retreat help us define our Christian vocation and become active through history.

**5 Evaluating our decisions from a Christian perspective**

Community meeting 11 and document 9, A Process for Evaluating Our Decisions from a Christian Perspective, on pages 193—197, present material for completing this step.

PERSONAL REFLECTION AND WORK IN THE PERSONAL DIARY

**A. I know myself better**

Reflect in silence on the following questions and write in your personal diary what you discover as important for your life project:

- Do you let your parents, friends, teachers, or others decide for you? If so, what type of decisions do they make for you?
- Are you aware of the importance of your minor daily decisions: whether to study or go for a walk, to go out with some friends or with others, to have a beer or not, and so on?
- What important decisions do you have to make at this stage of your life? Which are the most difficult for you? Why?

**B. I am becoming aware of my reality**

Of the people you live with or know, who can advise you when you have to make important decisions? In what aspects of life can each of these people give you advice? Jot your answers in your personal diary.

**C. I listen to God's call to create history**

1. Repeat the word "Jesus" several times in your mind, saying it more slowly and more deeply each time. When you feel you are in Jesus' presence, ask him to help you listen to what he wants to tell you in the same way that he heard his Father's voice.

2. Listen to God's call: What decisions is God asking you to make with greater care? What insights does God give you to help you make a wiser decision?

Closing prayer

1. The facilitator reads aloud Wisdom of Solomon 9:9–18. Then the facilitator invites everyone to meditate on the reading in silence for a moment, letting God speak to their heart.

2. The community members pair up, hold their partner's hands, and close their eyes. Each person prays for his or her partner, asking God to enlighten the partner in what he or she needs the most.

3. The community closes by praying this adaptation of the Memorare, an ancient prayer to Mary, asking her help in their efforts to discern God's ways:

Memorare

Remember, our dear Virgin Mary,
that none of those who pray to you,
ask your protection, implore your help,
or seek your intercession
is left unaided.

Hear our petitions, and in your mercy,
respond to them. Amen.¹

