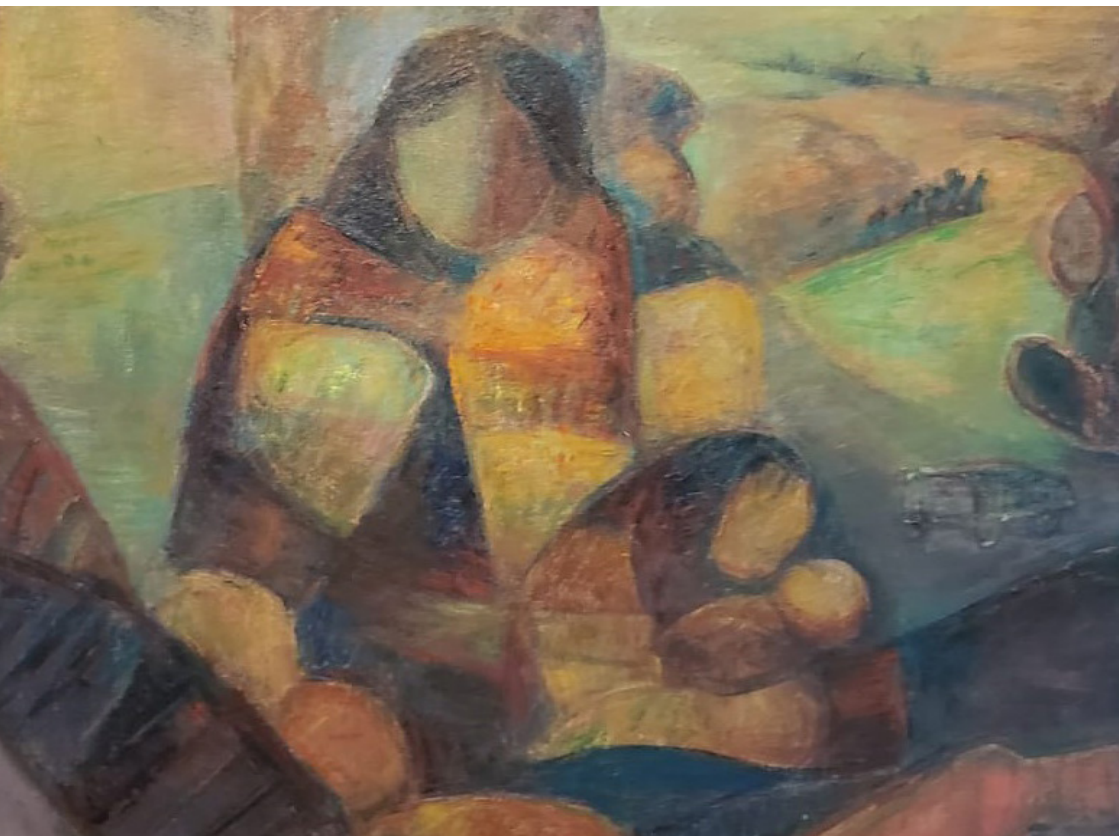




**SUSSIDI**

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**THE SCALABRINIAN  
LAITY**



Cover: painting by Felix Barrenechea

# THE SCALABRINIAN LAITY

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Roma, 2020

## METHODOLOGY

1. Initial moment of recollection (prayer or singing)
2. **Objectives of the handbook 10**
  - The subsidy aims to present in summary form the origins, development, and profile of the Scalabrinian laity.
  - Above all, it proposes to encourage reflection on the opportunities, difficulties, and prospects for the Scalabrinian laity today.
3. **Summary of the handbook 9**
4. **Development of the handbook**
  - Brief historical excursus
  - Opportunities for the involvement of the laity
  - Towards a profile of the Scalabrinian laity
  - What are the specific tasks of the laity among migrants?
  - What are the difficulties that the laity encounters in his work with migrants?
  - How can the laity grow in their service with migrants?
4. **The final** sharing can revolve around the following questions:
  - What are the reasons for my involvement with the Lay Scalabrinians ?
  - What are the aspects that have enriched me most in this experience?
  - What difficulties have I encountered in my work as a Lay Scalabrinian?
  - What suggestions can I offer for a growth of the Lay Scalabrinian group?
5. **To learn more**
  - Reading texts on local reality can be indicated.
  - Continue by watching some theme films or specific videos with related discussion.
6. **Evaluation**

Fill out the short form that is distributed
7. **Conclusion** with a prayer or a song.

The migration issue has now reached an attention unimagined a few years ago. While in the past work in the field of human mobility was considered a niche, now it has become a main theme. It involves many aspects of society, with a media overexposure that has made migration one of the most heated topics of discussion.

The fact that it is a theme at the center of the public debate has caused for many people to come into contact with the phenomenon of migration, and in particular, with those involved in it. Exemplary from this point of view is the role of non-governmental organizations (NGO). They have adopted migration as an area of attention or were established to intervene in the assistance and protection of migrants. For example, in Europe, after the cancellation of Operation Mare Nostrum, they began to deal with the rescue of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea. Until then, most people did not even know the meaning of the acronym NGO, and little they knew about the NGO's involvement with migrants. What followed, from a certain point of view, brought the dramatic issue to the fore and has sensitized a part of the population. From another point of view, it has brought along so much anger and prejudice towards both migrants and those who deal with them.

The same thing has happened within the Church, where in recent years the theme of migration has become present on the pastoral agenda of the dioceses as never before. Certainly, they were motivated and urged by the tireless action of Pope Francis, who made it one of the cornerstones of his pontificate. In the civil society, this attention to migrants has brought division and diversity of views even among Christians. In the Church, an increasingly important and visible role has been assumed by laity engaged in charitable actions within parishes, congregations, missions, etc.

Migrants now belong to the category of vulnerable people to whom we try to respond. While the pastoral care of migrants has always been the task of pastors, any other needs are now in the hands of the laity who increasingly have a professional preparation.

Among the low-threshold services offered to migrants there are also those offered to local people in difficulty, including:

- Food: providing canteen, food distribution.
- Health: offering clinics, distribution of medicines.
- Accommodation: search for home, for hosting families, housing mediation.
- Work: guidance, skills assessment, search for opportunities.

There are also other more specific services for the migrant population including:

- Legal service: application for international protection, renewal of residence permits, family reunification, etc.

- Literacy: language courses at various levels.
- Integration: sport, art, music, leisure, recreational play.

## 1. BRIEF HISTORICAL EXCURSUS

Lay activity has been present since the dawn of the Scalabrinian Congregation. Scalabrini clearly envisioned the specific role of the laity. “Therefore, understand the nobility and greatness of your mission, o lay people, and make sure that you correspond to it worthily”<sup>1</sup>. To raise awareness of the reality of migration in Italian society and to support initiatives in favor of migrants, he founded benevolent committees and associations in various cities of Italy. In 1889 he instituted the Saint Raphael’s Benevolent Society, a lay association with the task of assisting, accompanying and welcoming Italian migrants in the ports of departure and arrival. It was particularly active between Italy and the United States<sup>2</sup>.

### The Italian Catholic Federation (ICF) in California

In emigration, the work of the laity was organized mainly on the model of Catholic Action or local lay organizations. In California, Luigi Providenza, an Italian migrant from Chiavari, founded the Italian Catholic Federation<sup>3</sup>, which began in San Francisco in 1924 and is still active. It was an organization that operated on a parish basis. In the late 1950s it developed into a missionary structure, with a small group of missionaries from various congregations with the task of visiting different chapters and preaching missions. From 1957 to the 1970s various Scalabrinian religious served as missionaries in the ICF, but the cooperation never became a formal institutional participation

### The Italian Catholic Federation (ICF) in Australia

In 1960 the Scalabrinians founded in Fitzroy (Melbourne) the Italian Catholic Federation, also modeled on the template of Catholic Action<sup>4</sup>, to promote the religious, social, and cultural well-being of Italians and to further their integration. On the one hand the ICF was needed to maintain the apostolic fruit of the “flying missions”, through which missionaries reached once a year Italian migrants who did not have a religious service in their own language. On the other hand, there was the need to facilitate the integration of migrants in local society and parish community. The ICF organized itself into various chapters, with a biennial

<sup>1</sup> Intervista concessa al direttore dell’*“Italia coloniale”*, Genova, dic. 1901.

<sup>2</sup> Rossi, B. e M. Sanfilippo. *Un’opera ben più vasta. Gli inizi della Congregazione Scalabriniana e l’Opera di patronato S. Raffaele*. Roma, UCOS-CSER, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Francesconi, M. *Storia della Congregazione Scalabriniana*, vol VI, 1978, p. 341).

<sup>4</sup> Francesconi, *Ibidem*, p. 86.

Congress and later also a youth section. The ICF is still active and has been a valid support for missionary initiatives through all these years.

### **Scalabrinian Missionary Apostolate in Emigration (AMSE)**

This movement was born in 1956 on the initiative of Fr. Giovanni Saraggi and the approval of the superior general, Fr. Prevedello. Initially it was called Auxiliaries of the Scalabrinian Missions for the Migrants. It was intended to support missionaries in making known the charism of the Congregation and engender sensitivity towards migrants. The movement was relaunched in 1964 in Piacenza, with Fr. Luigi Tacconi and Fr. Sisto Caccia. Groups of lay were formed in various cities, in general under the responsibility of the vocations' animators. Since Italy was basically still a migrants' country of origin, direct pastoral activity with migrants was organized through visits to some missions in Europe. The movement had its own statute, a newsletter and summer training camps. In response to the post-Vatican II sensitivity, the term "auxiliaries" was dropped in favor of the term "apostolate", maintaining the same acronym. However, by the late 1960s, interest faded away and eventually the movement died out.

By the mandate of the Congregation's General Chapter of 1992, the attention to a more direct and more specific collaboration with "Scalabrinian" laity resumed, following a period of pastoral collaboration at local level with the various pre- and post-conciliar lay movements. The Assembly of Major Superiors of 1993 entrusted the General Secretariat for Pastoral and Religious Life the task of promoting the rise and development of the Scalabrinian lay movement. The Secretariat, at its first meeting in New York in 1994, laid down guidelines and a work plan. From there many initiatives developed at the local level. Practically every province gave rise to more or less structured groups of lay people (in addition to the ICF in Australia, the Clairefontaine group in France, Belgium, Luxembourg, groups linked to the parish world in South America, groups linked to the pastoral attention to workers and migrants in Europe). Initial training kits were prepared. A needed boost to the activity of the laity came from the possibility for young people to volunteer in the centers for migrant in North America. Some regional meetings had a significant impact on the group. These include the Jubilee Meeting of the Laity of Latin America, held in Guaporé (Brazil) in 2000, highlighting the importance of combining training, organization, and mission. Groups from Central and North America met in 2001 in Tijuana to reflect on the challenge and richness of diversity and the impact of the borders on people's lives. The various initiatives found the most striking moment of convergence at the international symposium organized in Piacenza in 2005.

Since then, the organizational aspect at the Congregation level met some difficulties. Nonetheless, local initiatives continued. Particular attention has been given to the formation of the laity, mostly through a series of educational units originated in North America. Important insights took place at the level of secretarial meetings and general chapters. Unfortunately, these insights did not produce a significant aggregation of men and women interested in working with Scalabrinian missionaries for migrants.

## 2. OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE LAITY

The development of the mission with migrants increasingly becomes an incentive for the laity's cooperation, as demand for human promotion and the diversity of expectations on the part of the migrants are becoming more relevant

### **Migrant's Houses**

Throughout history, many are the initiatives that have characterized the involvement of Scalabrinians in the world of the Church and of migrations. In the last 30 years, the most incisive and representative of these has probably been the service of Migrant Houses. The Migrant Houses of the Scalabrinian Congregation have made the history of the joint action between missionaries and laity. The hospitality service to migrants in these Houses, often located at the borders or in capital cities, has given a typical imprint to the role of the laity within the congregation.

"The Scalabrinian Migrant's Housing Network offers migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons services and advocacy programs to facilitate their integration into host communities, including their re-integration when they return to their countries. These Scalabrinian centers provide healthy meals, dorm accommodation, showers and bathing arrangements, access to telephones and Internet, legal assistance with documentation services, vocational training, and settlement programs. The whole network offers these people on the move a chance to rest and vigor before continuing their journeys"<sup>5</sup>.

Migrant Houses can be found in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, Italy, South Africa, Philippines, Indonesia, Taiwan, and Vietnam.

Historically, the person responsible for the migrant's house has always been a missionary. Recent years have seen a change of trend: many lay people are supporting the religious and in some cases even taking direct responsibility in the network.

<sup>5</sup> [www.scalabriniani.org](http://www.scalabriniani.org)



## **SIMN and ASCS**

At the end of the last century, the Scalabrini International Migration Network (SIMN) was found to meet the need for a more active and effective presence in the international context, with advocacy and international representation tasks. Later, SIMN developed fund raising capabilities to support the social works in the Congregation.

Currently the Scalabrini International Migration Network (SIMN) is a development resource for the Congregation. It carries out its activities through a variety of programs and services offered to migrants, refugees, displaced persons, nomads, and people on the move. Most of its professional and voluntary staff are lay people.

In Europe, at the beginning of 2000, the Scalabrinian Agency for Development Cooperation (ASCS) was founded as the operational arm of the Congregation in developing the social projects of the Scalabrinian Missionaries. The ASCS has fostered a model of training in volunteering and international cooperation. Many young people have prepared themselves by spending several months and even years in serving migrants and refugees around the world. In recent years, since Italy is increasingly becoming a land of mission, many lay people are making themselves available to accompany the Scalabrinian action.

## **The world of Youth**

Beside the various assistance services to the migrants, other activities are offered by Scalabrinians: they are aimed above all at the youth to raise awareness on the migration phenomenon. Notably active are the youth groups in Latin America, especially in Brazil.

For many years now, in Italy, young people are meeting in summer camps "Io ci stò"<sup>6</sup>. It is an experience carried out by Via Scalabrini 3<sup>7</sup>, an ASCS Youth Intercultural Animation program. Young people are exposed to the migration phenomenon with a special attention to seasonal migrants. They are involved in the experience of service, in sharing between volunteers, migrant workers, and the local community of the province of Foggia.

## **3. TOWARDS A PROFILE OF THE LAY SCALABRINIAN**

It is difficult to draw a distinct profile of the identity of a lay Scalabrinian. Many are the different experiences in the evolution of the Scalabrinian laity, reflecting on the variety of opportunities for involvement in work with migrants and the difference in perspectives in the various contexts. The Assembly of Major Superiors (ASM) of 1993 stated that "for Scalabrinian lay we envision a person who, aware of the baptismal

<sup>6</sup> [www.campoicisto.org](http://www.campoicisto.org)

<sup>7</sup> [www.viascalabrini3.org](http://www.viascalabrini3.org)

vocation, intends to realize it through a commitment to serve the migrants, according to the spirit and the Scalabrinian charism". In 2012, a more specific profile was drafted. A broad terminology of the figure of the lay Scalabrinian was provided by differentiating the various types according to the possibility and willingness to become involved in the mission with migrants.

First, there are *collaborators*: they play an active role in the various structures in which Scalabrinian missionaries operate such as parishes, missions, or houses for migrants. They are not members of a specific aggregation. Their cooperation is limited to a particular location.

Then there are *volunteers*: through contact with the Scalabrinian world, they have become passionately involved with migrants and intend to devote some of their time to them. These are specific choices, usually for a short period of time, and do not develop into a formal aggregation.

In a more specific sense, lay Scalabrinians are those who intend to be active members of the *lay movement*. They are, therefore, available for training and formal aggregation, with a commitment to a participation that extends over time. They differ from collaborators and volunteers because of their training program, the specificity of their choice and the duration of their commitment..

#### 4. WHAT ARE THE SPECIFIC TASKS OF LAITY AMONG MIGRANTS

In the journey of accompanying the migrants, the laity play a role of support and complement that of religious. Religious mainly, but not exclusively, deal with aspects closely related to spirituality by accompanying migrants on their journey of faith. The laity instead carry out tasks more closely linked to the practical aspects of daily life.

The migration phenomenon has changed its face. Catholic migrants were before the only beneficiaries of social and pastoral action: now the service is global. We often find ourselves serving people of other religions. Spiritual accompaniment cannot be carried out by missionaries: it must be complemented by another type of accompaniment, provided in most cases by the laity.

In recent years, the mission of the laity has entered a crucial phase, hardly occurring a few years ago. The laity is an integral part of the process of reflection and planning and not only of the operational level. This change leads to an increase in reflection, with many more elements to be considered. A blend between the great experience of the Missionaries and the professionalism of the laity facilitates an integral involvement for the good of the person. Regardless of the specific tasks that laity can perform among migrants, it is important to understand how their service can be achieved either as volunteers or in a professional way. These differences originate not only from the eventuality of an economic com-

pensation, but also in the specific role that the laity can play. Of course, even a layperson who provides service on a voluntary basis offers a contribution of professionalism.

Another important difference lies on the time laity can devote to a service among migrants. If it is a full-time job, they will be able to hold roles with greater tasks and responsibilities. If the laity can devote only a limited time, than the outlined roles will be limited to a mere support to the main activity

In his 1987 message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees on the theme *Catholic laity and migrations*, Pope John Paul II stated "migrations are linked to difficult problems, such as those of family reunification, work, home, school and social security. Individuals and lay associations continue to make their time and expertise available to migrants (doctors, lawyers, teachers, etc.)."

Although this quote refers to a message of several years ago, it is important to underline that these aspects, roles, and tasks are still relevant today. The world of human mobility is constantly evolving, but the needs and demands of migrants remain the same.

By examining the problems faced by migrants, it is possible to provide concrete examples of areas of action in which the laity find themselves involved. These are issues related, for example, to search for housing and job or access to health or school systems. The laity act within this purview, covering different tasks of administrative, legal, secretarial type, and related to health, social assistance, training, and education.

Sometimes migrants themselves can play an active role in mediating and providing services to other migrants. A lay person, migrant among migrants, can in fact make a great contribution by acting as spokesperson for the same needs that migrants themselves live.

Taking again inspiration from the Message of the World Day of Migrants and Refugees of 1987, the task of the laity in migration includes "the training of migrant groups with a strong spiritual imprint and awareness of Christian commitment; the creation of small communities of faith that keep in touch with each other and exchange experiences; the formation of parish councils composed of people who live the Christian message and enjoy the trust of the community. The first immediate apostles of the migrants must be the migrants themselves"<sup>8</sup>.

Casa Scalabrini 634, an ASCS program in Rome, is one of the first designed experience developed and managed almost completely by the laity. It is a concrete experience of how the training of lay professionals increases and strengthens the relational aspect often left in the background. The creation of links between natives and migrants is a fundamental phase for an effective integration of people: it is the peculiarity of the laity to be protagonists of this phase. The laity bring with them a

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<sup>8</sup> Idem

very “valuable” life experience to the migrant. With an active presence in the territorial community, with their ties, relationships, and daily activities, they help the “newcomer” integrate and start a new life as a citizen and not as a refugee.

In the past the laity were engaged in the activities of the Congregation mostly because of their closeness to the missionaries: in recent years things have changed. Now people of different ages and diverse characteristics are involved in working with migrants: young university students, retirees, and professionals from various backgrounds. It is the charism that brings together many people. Probably they do not even know either Scalabrini or the Congregation. Nonetheless they discover a common ground and find a new “family” where they can dedicate their time. There are, for example, several people who belong to the Catholic world but in need to know a well-defined charism like that of the Scalabrinians and then commit themselves to it. And then there are many people who, though far from the Church, recognize a unique value in the Scalabrinian family and while becoming closer to it, they identify more and more with the action of the Scalabrinian missionaries.

## **5. WHAT ARE THE DIFFICULTIES THAT LAITY ENCOUNTER IN THE WORK WITH MIGRANTS?**

The difficulties that a lay person encounters in the daily involvement with migrants can be analyzed and evaluated from two different points of view: the internal one, while in the direct work with migrants, and the external one, especially in dealing with society, employers, and access to services. The lay person often forms a link between them and the migrants themselves.

From an internal point of view, the contact with people of other cultures, religions, and languages could cause an initial shock. Diversity can be enriching, but at first it can create fear and the possibility of conflict.

The plans, the projects, and the programs on behalf migrants and refugees are very complex in many respects. Often our idea of the future and a well-being planning contradict that of the people on the move: this can cause frustration and disappointment.

It is difficult to put oneself in the shoes of those forced to leave their homeland in a traumatic way and even more difficult to imagine their future. This causes misunderstandings, departures, and distances at times difficult to bridge.

The comparison between the laity and the missionaries, together with a work of constant monitoring, can be a valid tool for awareness and evaluation of the difficulties they are facing, and so be able to outline useful strategies to overcome them.

From an external point of view, we find difficulties of different kind when we consider the laity as those who facilitate the participation of migrants in the life of the community, since they allow access to basic social services such as health, school, housing, and work<sup>9</sup>. These difficulties are related mostly to lack of information or prejudices which often reside in a particular community. For example, the laity engaged in facilitating housing accommodation for a migrant may have to face reject, due to prejudice, although all documentation to rent the house is in order. These are experiences of injustice that migrants face: they generate frustration and helplessness in the laity engaged on their behalf.

Sensitization of the local community takes on a fundamental character to respond to the many injustices that the laity could witness in their role as “facilitators” and in their daily work with migrants. This sensitization includes giving correct information on the reality of migration, creating opportunities for encounter where prejudices can disappear, cultivating an atmosphere of familiarity, in which migrants can be involved. To deal with these possible external difficulties training, discussion and monitoring mentioned above are essential.

## 6. HOW CAN LAITY PROGRESS IN THEIR WORK WITH MIGRANTS?

To progress in their service among migrants it is essential to offer the laity the opportunity to participate in encounters of training and discussion, both from a religious and from a more technical and professional points of view.

In the first case, the role of a priest is necessary in structuring and creating a path of formation to deepen those Christian values that inspire the laity to serve in the Church. This type of training must be “meant not just as transmitting of ideas and concepts but, above all, as a help – surely in an intellectual sense too – for them to bear the witness of an authentic Christian life”<sup>10</sup>. The Church’s commitment and role in accompanying the laity foster the growth of those Christian values which often animate lay groups themselves.

Considering, on the other hand, the aspects more related to the administrative, legal and social welfare areas, it is important that laity participate, according to their role, in targeted training that can improve the knowledge of the world of human mobility and so acquire specific skills. First and foremost, possessing basic terminology, competence and knowledge that allow the laity to be in tune with the understanding of migration reality, its facets, and different perspectives are needed. In addition to basic training, specific skills are also needed for the

<sup>9</sup> Parolin, G. *Chiesa Post Conciliare e Migrazioni*. Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Roma 2010.

<sup>10</sup> *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*, 88.

laity to adapt their professional preparation to the world of migration. For example, when it comes legal aspects, it is important for laity to participate in specific training so as to have basic knowledge of the new legislation when up-to-date laws, amendments or additions are published. For a true effective service it is essential to provide opportunities for monitoring and verification, to create spaces, to compare different roles by realigning all objectives, always keeping in mind the final beneficiaries of our service, the migrants.



