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SPIRITIN PRIESTS

I. LIVING IN A CREATIVE TENSION

Our Spiritan vocation brings together two realities which operate in a creative relationship: we are Religious Missionaries. The vast majority of Spiritans are ordained and so this adds another dimension to our calling. The different aspects of our single vocation are a wonderful enrichment, but they can also create tensions in how we live out daily our Spiritan calling.

1.1 DIMENSIONS OF A VOCATION?

At the very heart of being Religious is the call to be prophetic in our witness, not just in society, but also to the Church itself in its institutional dimension. A tension is therefore created because, as ordained priests, we participate in the hierarchical and institutional functioning of the church while also being called to the particular mission and charism of our Religious Congregation. So we must ask: Is the ordained Spiritan primarily a priest or a Religious? Does a tension exist between these two vocations?

Another issue emerges from the different traditions relating to how ordained ministry functions in the church. Diocesan priests, by their very nature, are associated with and belong to a local church and form the backbone of its ministry. However, the ministry and witness exercised by an ordained Spiritan fre-

quently involve mobility. It often means that we transcend the local and serve in ways, in places, or in circumstances different to those in which diocesan priests normally minister. One complements the other, and both serve the local church.

Throughout the history of the church, Orders and Congregations have found ways to embrace, in creative tension, the religious and ordained aspects of a vocation so as to enhance their service in the proclamation of the Reign of God. This served to enrich the local church as it bore witness to God's presence in the world.

1.2 HOW MIGHT COMPETING ASPECTS OF SPIRITAN ORDAINED MINISTRY BE RECOGNISED?

We need to reflect on how Spiritan priests might live the richness of our own particular calling. This will mean that we negotiate the various tensions that exist in this vocation in ways that are creative and yet fully faithful to the service of the missionary task of the Church, and in the tradition of our Founders.

The tension can present itself in a number of ways.

- There can be a tendency at times to see ordained priesthood as being the principal aspect of our vocation, and to see Spiritan identity as primarily serving in a local church as a 'priest in a parish', little different to the vocation of a diocesan priest.
- A tension could be addressed by moving to another extreme: downplaying what is specific to ordained priesthood as a ministry and, as a result, its importance for the nourishment of the local church in which we are asked to minister.

- To emphasise ordained ministry to such an extent that the call of other Spiritans (who are not ordained) is deemed to be secondary, supplementary, and of less importance.
- To give priority to ordination and religious life in such a way as to denigrate other forms of participation in the life of Christ through baptism, or to debase collaborative ministry. This can have the effect of allowing Orders (and Religious Life) overshadow a consideration of the relationship that God has with all peoples, baptised or not, and the profound sense of the dignity of the human person.

FOR REFLECTION:

1. As a Spiritan priest, can you discern any differences between how you minister in the church community, and how your brother diocesan priests minister?
2. Does one 'aspect' of a vocation have precedence over another? Does, for example, the Spiritan religious-missionary charism influence how ordained Spiritans exercise their priesthood? Should it?
3. Is there a difference between how the ordained Spiritan works, and how ordained members of other Religious groups work? Should there be a difference? If so, of what does this difference consist?
4. If there is no difference, then how does being a Religious-Missionary relate to Spiritan ordained ministry?
5. Does ordination create a two-tier approach to our shared religious and missionary lives as Spiritans? Should it?