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# ANIMA UNA

CONGREGATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

N° 65

General Council

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COMMUNITY LIFE

## ANIMA UNA

*Anima Una* is a Spiritan Generalate publication which continues the series Information/Documentation (I/D). It is a tool for formation, initial and ongoing. The name *Anima Una* taken from the Congregation motto clearly indicates the aim of all our formation programmes, to reach that unity to which Jesus calls his disciples.

As a tool for reflexion individually or in groups it is laid out in different chapters. At frequent intervals throughout the text a series of questions appears. The questions are designed to help an individual or a group to reflect more deeply on the text which has just been read.

Various dynamics could be used to work in groups.

- For example, a large community could together read a section of the text and then break into small groups to work on the questions. In this case the work groups could come together to the large group and share their findings. The whole exercise could be enriched by a prayerful atmosphere.
- A small community could do the reading and the group-work without dividing up.
- In an initial formation community this *Anima Una* could be used as a normal part of the spiritual formation of candidates.
- It could also be used by the Council of a circumscription or any leadership group in the Congregation.

## ABBREVIATIONS:

<i>Bagamoyo</i>	The General Chapter 2012 (Documents)
CL	<i>Christifideles Laici</i>
E.S.	<i>Ecrits Spirituels</i> , François Marie-Paul Libermann.
GSF:	<i>Guide for Spiritan Formation</i>
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i>
<i>Maynooth:</i>	The General Chapter 1998 (Documents)
N.D.:	<i>Notes et Documents relatifs à la vie et à l'oeuvre du Ven. Libermann</i> . 13 vols. Paris, 1929-1949.
PO:	<i>Presbyterorum ordinis</i> , Vatican Council II
SC	<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i>
<i>Spiritan Anthology:</i>	<i>A Spiritan Anthology: Writings of Claude-François Poullart des Places and François Marie-Paul Libermann</i> . Christian de Mare, ed. Rome, 2011.
SRL:	<i>Spiritan Rule of Life</i> . Rome, 1987; 3rd Ed., Rome 2005.
<i>Torre d'Aguilha</i>	The General Chapter 2004 (Documents)

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## INTRODUCTION

To foster mission in community, the Bagamoyo General Chapter 2012 asked the General Council to publish a special 'Anima Una' on community life.<sup>1</sup> The present document fulfils this mandate. Its publication coincides with the third phase of the Animation Plan of the General Council which is centred on Spiritan community living.

The aim of this document is to strengthen the sense of belonging to the one Spiritan family. It takes seriously the invitation of the Bagamoyo General Chapter to reflect on the issue of Spiritan culture. "Communities and circumscriptions will reflect on the issue of "Spiritan culture" and will endeavour to translate into day-to-day living the many principles and values we profess."<sup>2</sup> The core element of "Spiritan culture" is community life which Francis Libermann stated as the first principle of Spiritan life. "To bring the apostolic life—for which Spiritan life is intended—to its perfection, to assure the continuance and the development of the works in which it engages and to foster the holiness of its members, the Congregation has adopted life in community as its founding principle. Its members shall all live in community at all times."<sup>3</sup>

All of us are asked to take this call to community renewal to heart and pray that the Holy Spirit will renew our communities and make them true places of witness to the Gospel we preach.

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<sup>1</sup> Bagamoyo 4.6.

<sup>2</sup> Bagamoyo 2.10.7.

<sup>3</sup> François Libermann, *Rule of 1849*; N.D. X, 454; SRL 27.

This document follows the hermeneutic method of see, judge, act, as a way of reading and responding to the signs of the times. First, it begins with the presentation of the realities of our community living, its strengths and weaknesses (Chapter 1). Then, it relates these realities to resources of the Christian tradition, especially the practice of Jesus, the first Christian communities and recent Church documents (Chapter 2). The document goes further to ground the ideal of community life in the Spiritan tradition flowing from our founders, François Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann (Chapter 3). Finally, it lays out objectives and some examples of best practice for the renewal of our community living (Chapter 4).

# COMMUNITY LIFE

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## I. THE REALITY OF SPIRITAN COMMUNITY LIFE

### 1.1 INTERCULTURALITY/INTERNATIONALITY

Spiritans communities are more and more international, cross cultural and inter-generational”.<sup>4</sup> This is a result of the geographical and cultural spread of membership which led to a significant demographic shift over the recent years.<sup>5</sup>

Spiritans are grateful to God for this diversity. *The Spiritan Rule of Life* states that the diversity of our membership is the work of the Spirit of Pentecost who brings us together into one large family, “from different cultures, continents and nations” (SRL 37). It bears witness to the relevance of our Spiritan charism in the contemporary world that is in dire need of peace and reconciliation.

The positive witness of international communities is one of the qualities of Spiritan life that bishops, priests and laity of the local churches underline as special to Spiritans. They see it as a contribution to the structuring of local churches and human

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<sup>4</sup> Torre d’Aguilha 2.1.

<sup>5</sup> The demographic shift comes out clearly in the last statistics of 31 December 2016. Spiritans are 2598 from 46 circumscriptions of origin. The breakdown according to continents is as follows: Africa (1469); North America (103); South America (30), Asia (18); Caribbean (64), Europe (848), Oceania (1) and Indian Ocean (65).

society. In many places, bishops state this as the reason they want Spiritans to work or remain in their dioceses.

The majority of Spiritan formation communities, especially in the second cycle, are international and intercultural. They bring together students of circumscriptions belonging to a particular Union as well as students from outside the Union. Formators dedicate time to train the confreres in the Spiritan culture of hospitality and openness to the other. The Congregation is grateful to those formators and spiritual directors who accompany the younger brothers in this difficult task.

Diversity naturally creates the possibility of tension, fear and sometimes mutual suspicion. Symptoms of ethnocentrism and nationalism, which are present in the world are also found sometimes in Spiritan communities. In certain circumscriptions, ethnic and cultural divides play a role in determining who will be Provincial or on the council and whether or not his authority will be accepted. These also determine the credibility given to the word of a formator in a formation community. Decisions made by the authority (postings, recommendations, sanctions, etc.) are interpreted from this point of view.

Another area where the experience of diversity creates tension is the transition from formation to apostolic communities. It can be traumatic for some. Multiple adaptations are called for. One often has to negotiate a new language and culture in a new environment, with confreres from different cultures who have gone through a different formation and have a different mentality. The trauma is compounded if no one seems to care about what the young confrere is going through.

*For reflection*

- a) *From your experiences, what are the joys and difficulties of living in an international/multicultural community?*

b) *How well do our formation programs prepare people for cross-cultural mission?*

## 1.2 INTERGENERATION

Our Congregation is blessed with many elderly confreres who sacrificed their youth and energy for the service of Spiritan mission in many continents. Today they continue their Spiritan mission through a life of prayer and humble acceptance of their physical limitations and sufferings. Many of them are examples of “graceful ageing” as they welcome the reality of transition with gratitude to God for the marvels he realises through human fragilities. By so doing, they transmit memories and traditions to the younger ones. Young confreres are touched by this act of witnessing when they see their ageing brothers welcome suffering with dignity and accept to be taken care of by others.

However, perceptions and visions differ according to age. Some older confreres do not trust the capacity of the younger ones to carry on the missionary projects of the Congregation and maintain the structures they put in place. They are reluctant to give their positions of responsibility to young confreres. On the other hand, some younger confreres are not sensitive to the attachment of their older brothers to a certain style of mission, to their memory as well as to their diminishing capacities. Sometimes, young confreres are tempted to think that they have nothing to learn from the old, while some elderly confreres feel they have to teach the young ones and have nothing to learn from them; they often question the young confreres’ commitment to the Congregation and to the mission to which they were appointed. In some instances, some older confreres

appear to be more progressive as regards openness to new challenges, pastoral approaches, understanding of mission, finance, priestly ministry, than some younger confreres, who tend to be more conservative.

*For reflection*

- a) *What is your experience of intergenerational living in your circumscription?*
- b) *What are the difficulties?*

### 1.3 PRIESTS AND BROTHERS

Spiritans religious life is blessed with two principal forms: some confreres are priests and some are brothers. However the relationship between these two realities in Spiritan communities has often been a source of tension. The fact that priests belong to the hierarchical and institutional order of the Church leads sometimes to the tendency to clericalism in communities, which tends to reduce Brothers to second class Spiritans. Cultural factors play a significant role in the perception of the place of the Brother in the Church. In many places the vocation of brothers is misunderstood and they encounter numerous humiliations generally because they are compared with priests, rather than understood as a separate and distinct vocation. This issue has been largely dealt with in the *Anima Una* on Spiritan Priests.<sup>6</sup>

Another major challenge comes from the fact that the Spiritan Congregation by its canonical status is a clerical institute. This means canonically that only members who are priests can be elected to the position of major superior (SRL 168). Bagamoyo

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<sup>6</sup> General Council, *Spiritans Priests, Anima Una* 64, June 2012.

2.12 asked that this matter be revisited. The recent document of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life<sup>7</sup> has also opened the door for this reflection.

*For reflection*

- a) *How is the vocation of brothers considered in your circumscription?*
- b) *How do we ensure equality in our structures and communities ?*

## 1.4 SHARING COMMUNITY WITH LAITY

**M**any communities live in solidarity with laity who share their joys and sorrows. They pray together, discern and work together in particular apostolates within the local Church. In some circumscriptions, the Spiritan community includes Lay Spiritans, whom “we welcome...with joy, inviting them to share our spirituality and our apostolic life” (SRL 24.3). Our covenantal journey with them, “expressed in commitments of various forms and nurtured by formation”<sup>8</sup> is mutually enriching. Living and celebrating the complementarity of charisms and vocations greatly enlivens the community, its witness, and its mission..

*For reflection*

- a) *How are lay people integrated in the life and mission of your circumscription?*

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<sup>7</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church*, Vatican, 4<sup>th</sup> October 2015, n° 39.

<sup>8</sup> Bagamoyo 2.13.

b) *In what ways can the professed Spiritans and the Lay Spiritans benefit from one another?*

## 1.5 SPIRITAN HOSPITALITY

Spiritans communities are known for the quality of their hospitality to confreres, families and visitors. We celebrate together both joyful and sorrowful moments in confreres' lives and those of the local community, thus deepening the care we owe each other and reflecting our motto "cor unum et anima una." We welcome members of the larger Christian community to our community prayer, something that enriches all. Significant testimony is given by Spiritan communities which are hospitable and open to the poor and marginalized. They sometimes struggle to make space for those who have been wounded by life or who cannot walk at the same pace as healthy people.

This hospitality also leads to tension in some places. It can be difficult to define where the boundaries are, to what extent the community can welcome visitors and friends and, at the same time, ensure private space for its members.

The question becomes more delicate when it is a question of welcoming members of the natural families of confreres. Sensibilities differ according to cultures and traditions. Some cultures focus on the individual, while others are more communally-minded. Actual experiences of family are also very diverse: nuclear or extended families, harmonious and supportive or conflicted and broken families, families with an only child or with many siblings, and so on. The challenge is to reflect on a reasonable balance between the time and space dedicated to hospitality to family members and friends and the

safeguarding of the serenity and intimacy of life in the community.

*For reflection*

- a) *How is hospitality expressed in your community?*
- b) *How do you handle the relationship with members of your families?*

## **1.6 POLARITY OF COMMUNITY LIFE AND MISSION**

**S**piritans wrestle with the polarity of community and mission, the demands of community life and the demands of missionary life.

On one hand, there is a risk of regarding the community as a refuge and comfort zone. The community is used to avoid the risk and discomfort that come from exposure to missionary challenges. The values of living together could serve to camouflage self-centeredness and a lack of emotional maturity or the difficulties of social contact and insertion into a different culture.

On the other hand, some may tend to neglect community living on the basis of zeal for mission, regarding their confreres as simply neighbours with whom they maintain cordial relations, what is sometimes called “living together separately”. The discomfort of relations in community, internal tensions and individualism, are given as reasons to flee from the community and the demands of living and working in common. Mission becomes a multiplication of activities or a large network of social relationships often lacking community discernment.

These two extremes, which are in fact the result of a misguided understanding of both mission and community, can be harmful and consequently compromise Spiritan mission itself. The tension between the collective and the individual can create a lot of difficulties: difficulty in planning and evaluating community missionary work together; difficulty in writing a community project. Some confreres are suspicious of community projects and effectively regard community living as an obstacle to mission. They claim that the real project is the Spiritan Rule of Life and that there is no need for an extra one.

*For reflection*

- a) *What tension do you experience between community and mission?*
- b) *How do you resolve any issues involved in this tension?*

## **1.7 REGIONAL COMMUNITIES**

**T**he Spiritan Rule of Life (32.1) foresees that, in the case of Spiritans living and working alone or with non-Spiritans, they are “grouped together as a regional community.” Some circumscriptions have a long tradition of such regional communities. Others question whether it is authentic community living. Often these regional communities fail to function in accordance with SRL and confreres merely assemble for occasional gatherings around Spiritan feast days. Some confreres have been on their own for such a long time that they no longer have the skills for community living.

*For reflection*

- a) *How is the reality of regional communities understood in your context?*

b) *What efforts are being made to reduce the number of confreres living alone?*

## 1.8 FINANCES

Sharing finances in common is an essential aspect of Spiritan community life. The Spiritan Rule of Life states that “Whatever we receive as a gift or in payment for our work-gifts, salaries, pensions, grants, insurance benefits, mass stipends and every other income we may derive from our work- belong to the Congregation” (Canon 668.3) (SRL 65).

Sharing all in common in religious community calls for ongoing self-transcendence, accountability and transparency in the service of our common vision. A culture of increased individualism and materialism makes the challenge of community life ever more acute. This is evident in the habit of financial autonomy and unwillingness to share on the part of some confreres. In many circumscriptions, some confreres retain gifts, stipends and salaries for personal use and occasionally own and/or build properties in their own name or that of family members. The impression therefore given is that some confreres are financially better off than others and able to do what they want while their circumscriptions remain financially in need; inequality among confreres often goes unchecked. Expenses are seen as the responsibility of the community while income is kept for oneself. Such a practice, even though unacceptable, is widespread in our Congregation. It destroys trust and thus prevents collaboration.

Some communities seem always on the edge, especially financially; they are barely able to care for members or sustain them in the apostolate. Members may not be able to take due

holidays or periods of renewal to refresh themselves after a considerable period of time on mission.

A delicate situation is created where one member of a community is the principal source of funds both for the community and the mission, especially if the person concerned behaves as the “breadwinner” and “donor”!

The issue of “pocket money” is often a source of conflict. Some communities have a tradition of a fixed monthly amount for personal use. Others prefer to talk of running expenses, “fonds de roulement”, i.e. money put at the disposal of the confreres for a given period of time. Some others prefer a common community box from which each takes according to need.

Another question can be how to support families of confreres in difficult financial situations. This can be a source of tension or even conflict in communities. A deeper discernment needs to be done in order to respond fairly to these situations.

*For reflection*

- a) *How do you share the resources in community?*
- b) *How do you respond to the demands of families of confreres in financial difficulties?*

## 1.9 SERVICE OF AUTHORITY

*A*mong the services necessary to life in community, authority as a force for unity holds a special place” (SRL 46).

The Congregation has many superiors at different levels who reflect and live this vision. Many superiors provide dynamic animation of their communities. Confreres have memories of superiors who accompanied them in different communities and helped them to feel loved and cared for.

However, some superiors lack an understanding of their role and function in a community or circumscription or feel unprepared for it. This is shown in the inability to provide sufficient accompaniment for confreres or to follow procedures and decision-making processes in accordance with SRL. Some adopt an authoritarian leadership style; others adopt a more laissez-faire attitude and avoid taking decisions. Sometimes inflexibility, personal issues and hidden agendas get in the way, to the detriment of the overall good and interests of the community.

Some confreres seem averse to all authority and react negatively to any effort to dialogue about themselves and their mission. It may, however, be time to reflect also on how far the term “superior” corresponds to the Spiritan ministry of the service of authority.

*For reflection*

- a) *How do you understand the service of authority?*
- b) *What areas of improvement are needed?*

## **II. COMMUNITY LIFE IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION**

Christian tradition, especially the experience of the apostles with Jesus, as well as that of the first Christian communities, underlines the primacy of community life.

### **2.1 THE COMMUNITY OF JESUS**

One thing that is evident in the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles is that the *raison d’être* of the community is that

the members are chosen by Jesus himself. He called the apostles to live with him. He is the Good Shepherd who brings together his flock, knows his sheep, takes care of them, especially the most vulnerable (cf. Jn 10, 4.11-14; Mt 18,12-14).

The call of the apostles is concomitant with the launching of Jesus' public ministry (Mt 4, 17; Mk 1,5). This means that the community life of Jesus and the disciples is a sign of the presence of the kingdom and a form of proclamation of the same kingdom: "that they may be one...so that the world may believe" (Jn 17, 21). It is evident that Jesus accords a singular importance to the community without neglecting the expression of individual strengths.

As sign and symbol of the kingdom, Jesus' community brings together people of different sensibilities and social origins. They are called to live and experience the new lifestyle that Jesus proposes to humanity. Fishermen journey together with the learned; civil servants (tax collectors), assimilated to the Roman colonial government, journey together with Judean freedom fighters. Their diversity shows that the fraternal life to which God invites humanity is not subject to human sentiments of the present moment, rather, the disciples have to be at the service of peace and unity announced by Jesus. This means that homogeneity is not a criterion for community life. Jesus invites all to enter into the dynamic of co-filiation, becoming brothers and sisters of Jesus, children of the same Father. It is this community that Jesus sends to preach the Good News (Mk 6,7-13).

The community of Jesus is characterised by the total self-giving of the members to one another. Hence the invitation to wash each other's feet and concretely forgive one another (cf. Jn 13,12-15). He commands the mutual love of one another (cf. Jn 13,31-35) and gives the supreme example through his total self-donation (cf. Jn 15,9-12). He is proud to call them friends (cf. Jn

15, 13-15) and reminds them that they owe friendship and care to one another. Gradually, Jesus forms his community to be the premise of a new humanity that announces the kingdom, that is already but not yet.

However, Jesus does not minimise the conflicts inherent in such a community. First, the apostles contest his action or non-action (cf. Jn 4,27; Mk 4,38; Lk 18,15-17). There is unhealthy competition among them (cf. Lk 22, 24-30). Many times, Jesus scolds them for their lack of faith which perturbs their community life and the preaching of the Gospel (cf. Mk 10,42-45; Lk 9,52-56). The Gospels show that the search for harmony and unity in the community goes hand-in-hand with the search for solutions to conflicts which arise from confrontations based on differences of origin and the character of persons.

To form a community according to the spirit of Jesus is to bring people of different sensibilities, cultures and origins to espouse a common project, to be brothers, sisters and friends of Jesus, children of the same Father for the birth of a new humanity. Jesus prays for them so that they may be one (cf. Jn 17, 11) because their unity is a proof of the authenticity of his mission, a gauge of the credibility of his identity: his unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit as the basis for the unity of humanity. The risen Christ confirms this community project of co-filiation by his injunction to Mary of Madgala when he says: "...go and find the brothers, and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." (Jn 20, 17-18).

## 2.2 THE NEW TESTAMENT COMMUNITIES

*T*he memory of Jesus pushed the first Christians to organise their communities around four principal axes: a) the

teaching of the apostles; b) the witness of life; c) service to others through fraternal sharing and solidarity; d) the liturgical practice of the sharing of bread (cf. Acts 2, 42-47). This ideal is presented as being of one heart and one soul (cf. Acts 4, 32), *cor unum et anima una*.

However, some instances show that this ideal met with counter witnesses and difficulties. Think of the case of the couple, Ananias and Saphira (cf. Acts 5,1-11). Other crises like the discrimination against widows of non-Jewish origin and those of the diaspora (cf. Acts 6,1-6), would challenge the fidelity of the community to the vision of Christ. Nevertheless, the texts show the apostles' readiness to resolve these conflicts according to Jesus's principles and thus safeguard unity, fraternity and solidarity within the community (cf. Acts, 6,1-6; Acts 15, 1-29).

The concern for unity runs through the Pauline tradition. The new communities born in different geographic areas, cultures and times had to reflect on the consequences of being the body of Christ (cf. Rm 12,4-5). Fragile communities faced the danger of disintegration (cf. 2 Co 12, 20-21). Paul reminds them that being Christian is realised through commitment to forming one body in Christ with others. Other epistles express the same teaching. For example, James denounces the divisions and internal wars (cf. James 4,1-2) in the community. John reaffirms the concern for fraternal love (cf. 1Jn 4,1-12) as the unique way of experiencing co-filiation (cf. 1Jn 3,1-3) echoing the words of the Psalmist: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps 133,1). Community witness is integral to mission.

## 2.3 COMMUNITY LIFE IN CHURCH DOCUMENTS

Christian tradition, as portrayed in Church documents, emphasizes community life as the usual form taken by consecrated life. This is translated as the readiness to sacrifice oneself for others according to the spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council observed that creation has a community motive: “God did not create for life in isolation but for the formation of social unity.”<sup>9</sup> Likewise, salvation has a community dimension. God does not want to save human beings merely as individuals but as a people.<sup>10</sup> It is through this experience that the Church is called the people of God, the family of God, sign and symbol of the union of God with humanity.<sup>11</sup>

The Decree on the Renewal of Consecrated Life, *Perfectae caritatis*, underlines community life as the expression of the Christian mystery which witnesses to the presence of Christ in the world.<sup>12</sup> It also highlights the strong connection between mission and community living, and even goes on to say that, in certain situations, congregations may have to abandon “those works which today are less relevant to the spirit and authentic nature of the community” (PC 20).

Later on, expanding the teaching of Vatican II, Pope Saint John Paul II, in *Vita Consecrata*, presented fraternal life in community

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<sup>9</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* 32.

<sup>10</sup> *Lumen gentium* 9.

<sup>11</sup> *Lumen gentium* 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Perfectae caritatis* 12.

as “an eloquent sign of ecclesial communion.”<sup>13</sup> He argued that, in the light of the first Christian communities, community life is lived concretely through sharing everything in common: material goods and spiritual experiences, talents and inspirations, apostolic ideals and charitable service. In a world torn apart by ethnic hatred and senseless violence, fraternal life in community is presented as a sign of the spiritual communion to which humanity is called: “Placed as they are within the world's different societies (...) communities of consecrated life, where persons of different ages, languages and cultures meet as brothers and sisters, are signs that dialogue is always possible and that communion can bring differences into harmony.”<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, *Vita Consecrata* emphasises the role of the superior as one who guides his brothers in the apostolic and spiritual life, whose task is “essential for strengthening fraternal communion and in order not to render vain the obedience professed.”<sup>15</sup>

These reflections are further deepened by Pope Francis. In *Evangelii Gaudium* he underlines the fact that community does not annihilate differences, but that fraternity in community is open to the complementarity of differences. Individuality and personal identity are not suppressed by the community, “instead they receive new impulses to personal growth.”<sup>16</sup> This requires dialogue and attentiveness to one another. Therefore, Pope Francis goes on to point out that authentic relationships in community develop through deep communication where each person is allowed to share his/her personal story without fear of being judged and cajoled. Echoing the thoughts of Pope

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<sup>13</sup> *Vita consecrata* 42.

<sup>14</sup> *Vita consecrata* 51.

<sup>15</sup> *Vita consecrata* 43.

<sup>16</sup> Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24<sup>th</sup> November 2013, n° 235.

Francis, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life emphasizes that through prayer, especially the Eucharist, the members of the community can come to experience the humanizing power of the Gospel which is expressed through mutual respect, kindness and joy: “The community that sits at table and recognizes Jesus in the breaking of bread (cf. Lk 24:13-35) is also the place in which each one recognizes his frailty: Fraternity does not produce perfect relationships, but welcomes the limitations of all and takes them to heart and to prayer as a wound inflicted on the commandment of love (cf. Jn 13:31-35): a place where the pascal mystery brings healing and where unity grows.”<sup>17</sup>

*For reflection*

- a) *What do you learn from the community of Jesus and that of the first Christians?*
- b) *How do you handle the tension between unity and diversity in your communities and circumscriptions?*

### **III. COMMUNITY LIFE IN THE SPIRITAN TRADITION**

Claude Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann placed community at the centre of Spiritan life. While Poullart des Places sees community as the best place to form future apostolic workers, Libermann makes it the essential dimension of the apostolic missionary life.

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<sup>17</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Keep Watch, Year of Consecrated Life*, Rome 2014, p. 55.

### 3.1 POUILLART DES PLACES: THE FORMATIVE DIMENSION OF COMMUNITY LIFE

**P**oullart des Places started his work in 1703 with the foundation of a community designated as the Seminary of the Holy Spirit. He believed that it is in the experience of community that future ministers will develop the spirit of availability (*paratus ad omnia*). Community is thus a sort of laboratory of human and spiritual life, where the individual learns self-donation.

At the beginning of 1703, Claude signified the act of foundation of the community by leaving the comfort and isolation of his apartment in St Louis-le-Grand and joining the discomfort of the house he rented for the students in Gros Chapelet. This was a clear indication of the lifestyle that he wanted for his Congregation. At the consecration of the work to the Holy Spirit, at Pentecost 1703, the house becomes a “home of charity” where every member finds love and care.<sup>18</sup>

### 3.2 FRANÇOIS LIBERMANN: COMMUNITY FOR APOSTOLIC LIFE

**L**ibermann’s missionary project was the salvation of the most abandoned souls and the preaching of the gospel to those who have scarcely heard it. He stressed the centrality of community as the means by which this missionary project can be achieved.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Joseph Michel, *Claude Poullart des Places*, p. 211.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Vincent O’Toole, “Libermann’s impossible dream?”, in *Spiritan Life, Apostolic Community Life*, n° 8, Rome, March 1999.

Libermann explains why he considered community life so important: When one lives in community and is directed in everything by the same superior, the good that is done is incomparably greater than if each worked in isolation from the other... Things are done with greater energy... everything is thought out better and properly put into effect... Since everyone is employed in the work for which he has the most aptitude, everything is carried out in a better way [ND II, 71]. More fundamentally he saw community life as essential for the stability and the extension of the works of the Congregation and for the personal holiness of each of its members upon which the effectiveness of the missionary task of the Congregation depends [ND X, 454]. However, he insisted that community life was not simply a physical coming together of people for greater effectiveness but a 'union of minds and hearts for a common purpose' [E.S. 141] and, towards the end of his life, he decried the tendency of some of the members of the Congregation to abandon community life for the sake of the apostolate, seeing it as an obstacle to mission, a practice which he considered to be a false missionary zeal ultimately undermining the unified missionary vision of the Congregation [ND XIII, 293-294].<sup>20</sup>

For Libermann, every other means adopted by the Spiritans for their apostolic life must be compatible with community life: "The means which the Congregation employs to attain its main aim are, in general, those which are not opposed to community life and which, by their nature, do not expose its members to the danger of laxity and of losing the spirit that should animate them."<sup>21</sup> He invited his confreres to make this clear to bishops

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<sup>20</sup> This paragraph was extracted from the Letter of the Superior General, John Fogarty, Message for Phase 3 of the Animation Plan, September 2016.

<sup>21</sup> *Règlements*, ND X 452.

who were inclined to dispersing confreres in parishes for the sake of the local needs of the mission. He allowed the taking up of parishes on the condition that community life is not endangered. A Spiritan “does not make his commitment with a bishop but with the Congregation represented by the Superior General. ..and so the superior cannot give subjects to a bishop except on that condition (community life), which is a real tacit contract.”<sup>22</sup>

The community superior has an important role in the construction of community life. He is responsible for the planning of projects and care of the brothers. He plays the role of animator and mobilizes the confreres for projects. Libermann gives details about the role of the superior in this context: He “will examine the project with his council, measure up the difficulties and prepare the necessary means to achieve success (...) Each would be employed according to his particular skills and this would make for greater efficiency.”<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, Libermann recognizes the fact that in some circumstances, a confrere can live alone. In that case, it should be for a brief period and care must be taken for the selection of the persons: “Although missionaries should live in community and be at least two together, nevertheless they can, if necessary, exercise the sacred ministry alone for a short period of time. Those who keep the rule exactly and who are most given to the interior life will be chosen for this kind of ministry. As far as possible, the same confreres should not always be sent out in this way and ordinarily, an interval shall be left so that they can take up again the habits of community life.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> ND IX, 99, 188.

<sup>23</sup> Memorandum to Secretary of Propaganda Fide. March 27, 1840. ND VI, 392-99; Cf. *Spiritans Anthology*, pp. 348-349.

<sup>24</sup> *Règlements* ND X, 469.

*For reflection*

- a) *As Spiritans coming from different cultures, what are the essential values that we share in common?*
- b) *How do we reach a common understanding of these values in our communities?*

## **IV. SPIRITAN COMMUNITY AND OUR MISSION OF EVANGELIZATION**

The renewal of our Spiritan identity demands that we reflect on the connection between mission and community in Spiritan life in the light of the experience of the Christian tradition and the teachings of our founders.

Community and mission are two inseparable and essential dimensions of Spiritan life. Communion in a Spiritan community is never an abstract reality lived for itself, it is mission-oriented. At the same time, we are not activists or employees of a non-governmental organization; we are witnesses to the possibility of the communion of humanity in Christ. Community is organized for mission and mission is an essential dimension of community life. Hence to sacrifice community life for mission is absurd.

### **4.1 CONSTITUTIVE ELEMENTS OF THE SPIRITAN MISSIONARY COMMUNITY**

Our community life is not a simple platform for logistics and the planning of projects to be executed. For authentic community life, the following elements have to be present:

sharing of life, sharing of faith, sharing of work, the community project and competent leadership.

#### 4.1.1 SHARING OF LIFE

Living under the same roof is the normal way to live Spiritan community. “A religious community lives in a house that has been legitimately erected” (SRL 32). However, SRL envisages the possibility of confreres living outside the community for exceptional reasons. In that case, a confrere may “live with people who are not Spiritans and sometimes even alone” (SRL 32). However, SRL insists that “in such cases members are either attached to a local community, when this is possible, or grouped together as a regional community” (SRL 32.1). In places where they exist, effort should be made to ensure that regional communities maintain the structure outlined in SRL 32.2: a superior, regular meetings, sharing life and prayer, etc. (SRL 153.2).

International community living is a great source of witness in the local churches and societies where we live. The Maynooth Chapter states that “by coming together from so many different places and cultures, we are saying to our brothers and sisters that the unity of the human race is not just an impossible dream. In this way, our community life is an integral part of our mission and a powerful witness of the Gospel.”<sup>25</sup> International community living, as Torre d’Aguilha will add later, is a “response to the call of the Holy Spirit to all of us, to witness to a new quality of human solidarity, surpassing individualism, ethnocentrism and nationalism.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Maynooth p. 117.

<sup>26</sup> Torre d’Aguilha 2.

Intergenerational dialogue needs also to be given a priority. Younger confreres are encouraged to spend time with older confreres. The encounter will enable the older confreres to share their life experiences, while the younger ones share experiences of new projects that emerge in the circumscription.

We need to reinforce the desire to create an evangelical fraternity. Each confrere should be welcomed as a gift to the community, with his differences, going beyond age, sensibilities and prejudices. From living side-by side with others, we need to move towards living together. This requires an attitude of humility and respectful attention to others, cultivating in us the humano-divine quality of encounter.

#### **4.1.2 SHARING OF FAITH**

It is not enough to live together; community life requires that the members be ready to share their faith together. This includes praying together the liturgy of the hours, celebrating the Eucharist and the sharing of faith convictions.

The community draws its energy from the liturgy of the hours and the Eucharist shared together. However, community regulations should not be a strait jacket that could eventually kill spontaneity and freedom and lead to frustration. The quality of our community prayer is crucial to the quality of community life in general. Sometimes a lack of creativity and vitality in community liturgical celebrations can lead to the temptation to celebrate the liturgy only as a legal compliance, a ritualistic obligation; this can quickly lead to disenchantment. The deeper the contemplative roots of the community, the more consistent will be the missionary expression of the community.

More still, members of a community should be ready to share their faith convictions and experiences in order to help each other discern the will of God for them help each other to grow. It is important to find a suitable forum for such sharing in every community. A community of faith is open to and grows through fraternal correction. Authentic fraternity requires that confreres be open to welcome and forgive one another: “community is a place of fraternity, prayer, sharing, dialogue, responsibility, reconciliation, celebration, consolation, security, planning, evaluation, fraternal correction and on-going formation” (Maynooth 4.13). These are fundamental elements in the construction of a ‘Spiritian culture’ and they provide a sense of belonging to the Congregation. Community and mission are two dimensions of the Spiritian vocation which are mutually enriching.”<sup>27</sup>

#### **4.1.3 SHARING OF WORK**

“Every member of the community has a part to play in the apostolic life common to all” (SRL 29). This means that no confrere does his individual work without connection with the common mission of the community. This common mission is normally defined in the community project. It is important here to state what a community project is and how it is formulated and evaluated.

#### **4.1.4 COMMUNITY PROJECT**

“The community project provides a dependable guide for Spiritian life and mission. Here are found the most important options of the community: community action, moments of

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<sup>27</sup> Bagamoyo 4.1.

celebration, pastoral commitments and involvement of and with the laity” (Bagamoyo 4.2; cf. SRL 44.3).

A community project is precious in the life of the Spiritan community. It has enormous potential to allow the members to dedicate themselves to the mission of the community and not lose the focus of its identity. For a community project to bear the expected fruits, the community has to face some major challenges: inclusivity and communion, commitment to the poor and creating boundaries as regards the safeguarding of minors and vulnerable adults.

### *Inclusiveness and Communion*

The presence of numerous lay people, with different types of bonds to our Spiritan family, is a great breath of fresh air and an invaluable opportunity for renewal and growth. With them, we can deepen our communication with the human and ecclesial community in which we find ourselves; this supposes a real culture of dialogue and learning with others and an attention to cultural, spiritual and religious sensibilities. Lay people have specific roles and approaches to mission and gifts that can help us to better accomplish our Spiritan missionary projects.

### *Being Poor Communities among the Poor*

The phrase quoted by Pope Francis: “I want a poor Church for the poor”<sup>28</sup>, may well be applied to the concrete reality of the Congregation and Spiritan communities. The evangelization of the poor, which is the *raison d’être* of Spiritan identity (SRL 4; 14) inspires our way of being and living on mission.

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<sup>28</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 198.

Consequently, our community life should be marked by a frugal and simple lifestyle.

Commitment to JPIC permeates our entire community and missionary life. Each confrere, each community and each circumscription should have this permanent ‘obsession’; the poor are our decisive criterion. However, this option cannot be understood in a univocal and indiscriminate way in different places where we work. It has to be adapted to the local situations according to the context and culture.

### *Safeguarding of Minors*

“The abuse of minors in any form – physical, sexual, emotional or neglect – is totally contrary to everything we stand for as followers of Jesus Christ in the footsteps of our founders who dedicated themselves to the most vulnerable in society.”<sup>29</sup>

Since our missionary commitments bring us into regular contact with minors, the community project should define healthy boundaries in order to prevent any form of abuse. This should be done in compliance with the guidelines defined by the Congregation, at the Generalate and local levels, as well as those of the local Church.

### *Formulating and Evaluating a Community Project*

In the formulation of the community project, it is necessary to arrive at a vision with concrete achievable objectives. It is good to take into account the classic hermeneutic principle of “see, judge, act”. It starts by a lucid diagnosis of the reality: what are the needs of the people and place where we are? (See). Then follows a discernment of the situation in the light of the word of God, the Christian tradition and the Spiritan tradition (Judge).

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<sup>29</sup> *Guidelines for Safeguarding Minors for the Members of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit*, p. 5.

Finally, the steps to be taken to achieve the objectives must be articulated and agreed upon (Act).

Whatever methodological approach is adopted, the process must integrate prayer, personal reflection and meeting. Reflection, dialogue, retelling personal and communal experiences are vital for the process.

The end result of the planning process should not be a generic and abstract document without the clear determination of achievable and realistic goals and objectives, a timeframe for the realization of the objectives and for what purpose? This means that objectives must be realistic and achievable within the prescribed period (one year? A three-year period? A six-year term ...?).

Of course, in all this, consistency is an essential characteristic. The community project has to be consistent with the missionary project of the province and the general orientation of the Congregation and in accordance with the needs of the local Church.

There are different methods for how to evaluate the realization of a community project. One is the "SWOT" analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats). The community project needs to be reviewed and even rewritten whenever the community integrates a new member. It is the best way to integrate the confrere into the project and at the same time give a new dynamism to the mission of the community.

#### **4.1.5 COMPETENT LEADERSHIP**

The role of the superior is important for the unity of the community (SRL 46). It is his responsibility to help the

community “to respond faithfully to its calling and to lead a joyful fraternal life” (SRL 47).

Where confreres find it difficult to be faithful to Spiritan identity and vocation, the superior “will accompany them with love and compassion, calling them to conversion.”<sup>30</sup> He will also impose sanctions where necessary in order that inappropriate situations “do not linger on unnecessarily and harm the individuals, the community and the local Church.”<sup>31</sup>

In a world marked by discrimination, domination and violence, Spiritan superiors are called “to develop a style of leadership in our circumscriptions and communities that fosters equality and inclusiveness, participation in decision-making and shared responsibility.”<sup>32</sup>

The animation of international communities requires particular attention from the local superior. He helps each confrere to welcome others and their diversities. He provides accompaniment, in particular to those who arrive for the first time on mission appointment.<sup>33</sup>

The tasks of the superior, as expressed above, challenge the Congregation to provide formation for those called to leadership at all levels. Superiors should also avail of the possibilities for updating their leadership skills, where offered by the local Churches.

More attention needs to be given to the choice of superiors during the Chapters and Assemblies of circumscriptions. Confreres have the responsibility “to choose the leadership not

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<sup>30</sup> Bagamoyo 2.11.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> John Fogarty, Pentecost Letter 2013.

<sup>33</sup> *Guide for Mission Appointment*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, October 2009, n° 2.4

merely on the basis of their organizational skills or human qualities but on their ability to embody the mission we are called to live and to preach.”<sup>34</sup>

## 4.2 SOLIDARITY

Spiritans solidarity is the expression of our sense of belonging and participation in the wider mission of the Congregation. It derives its impetus from the ideal of the first Christian communities, presented as being of “one heart and one soul” (Acts 4, 32), *cor unum et anima una*.

Real solidarity requires that communities and circumscriptions devise practical ways of ensuring that confreres share their resources and keep accounts. Accountability and transparency are required regarding salaries, gifts, stipends, according to the spirit of SRL 65 and Bagamoyo 5.1. Each Spiritan must be responsible in the honest use of material goods, which are always owned by the community and which should not therefore be channelled for inappropriate purposes.

While Spiritan communities need to be attentive to the families of their members, solidarity with families of confreres in need must be handled carefully. Some confreres come from poor families that need help. Some others have family obligations, sometimes unexpected, vis-à-vis their ageing or sick family members, etc. The solidarity responses to be adopted in each case require honest reflection in community and in the circumscription. What affects the family of a confrere affects the Spiritan family. In certain situations the community responds through concrete solidarity which can include financial

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<sup>34</sup> John Fogarty, Pentecost Letter 2013.

assistance, as stipulated in the Rule of life (SRL 40.1) This solidarity can also be expressed through the integration of the intentions of our various families in community prayer (SRL 99.10 ). However, confreres should also know that they cannot take care of all the problems of their families to the detriment of the vow of poverty they consciously made. From the early stages of formation, candidates for Spiritan life should be trained to understand that our Spiritan vocation requires a certain distance from family obligations and that they may not be able to respond to the needs of their families as expected.

### 4.3 COMMUNITY LIFE IN INITIAL FORMATION

*I*nitial formation offers the opportunity to acquire skills for international and intercultural living. As stated in the Guide for Spiritan Formation: “Each candidate comes from a particular culture. Entry into an international Congregation does not mean alienating oneself from one's own culture. Rather it is an invitation to challenge one's culture in the light of the Gospel and to prepare oneself to “shed” all that would impede an encounter with other cultures.”<sup>35</sup> Normally, formators are chosen in function of their international and intercultural experiences.<sup>36</sup>

The Period of Missionary Experience (PME) offers the possibility to experience intercultural living in a context outside one's own culture. This experience needs to be well accompanied in order that it becomes life-giving and helps to strengthen the commitment of the young confreres to mission in areas where the Church finds it difficult in getting workers.

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<sup>35</sup> *Guide for Spiritan Formation*, n° 23.

<sup>36</sup> *Guide for Spiritan Formation* n°11.2; 117).

The same applies to the transition from formation communities to mission appointment. Superiors of sending and receiving circumscriptions should endeavour to provide experienced mentors who can help young confreres to grow through this precious intercultural experience.<sup>37</sup>

## CONCLUSION

*A*s stated in the introduction, it is hoped that this edition of *Anima Una* will help all of us to rediscover the meaning of our calling as Spiritans. It will accompany all the members of the Spiritan family, especially during the rest of the third phase of the animation plan on Community life. We suggest that it be studied during community or circumscription gatherings, recollections, retreats, etc. The See, Judge, Act approach will also strengthen the evaluation of our community living and our fidelity to the heritage of our founders. The Generalate would be grateful to receive feedback from different communities and circumscriptions on whether this document has assisted them in their Spiritan community living.

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<sup>37</sup> *Guide for Mission Appointment*, 3.3 (g).

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## COR UNUM ET ANIMA UNA

God's call to come and work for the Kingdom is not made to us just once for all.  
Our response has to be updated continually. (SRL 142)

### Congregation of the Holy Spirit

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