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The Foundations – a Challenge to the Congregation

1. Introduction

In 1977, 69 out of 237 members in formation (29%) were from the southern hemisphere. Last year 374 out of 532 (70%) were from the south, as well as 90% of the additional 101 postulants. At the present rate of growth, it would seem that members from the Foundations and young Provinces will form close to 50% of the active membership by the General Chapter of 2004, barely 15 years away.

"We who come from different cultures, continents and nations, and who have different outlooks, are brought together by the Spirit of Pentecost into one larger community, the Congregation. Cultural diversity is welcomed as a positive factor. Our unity bears witness to reconciliation in Christ" (Spiritual Rule of Life, 37).

The influx of confreres from the Foundations has changed the face of mission and in a certain sense brought it to term. The evangelized are

taking their place as evangelizers side by side with confreres from the older Provinces of Europe and America. The Congregation at large is being invited to "widen the space of your tent, extend the curtains of your home, do not hold back" (Is. 54:2).

The Enlarged General Council (Arusha, Tanzania, 8-20 May 1989) considered aspects of our common solidarity in mission, and how best to affirm the values, goals and aspirations of various groups in the Congregation, harnessing them for the enrichment of all. The EGC of 1978 considered the Foundations, and in 1980, for the first time, a General Chapter document of the Congregation devoted a section to them. The Arusha EGC was, however, the first detailed stock-taking in which delegates representing the entire Congregation sat with the General Council to consider the concrete implications of the Foundations, evaluate progress, listen to human problems, and map out orientations for the future.

2. The Search for Identity

2.1 Religious-missionary vocations from local Churches

Foundations, like the older Provinces, take their identity from the local Church and from the charism of the Institute. Just as the Universal Church exists embodied in each particular and local Church, so also each Province or Foundation is a particular expression of the Spiritan vocation with roots in a local Church. Members of the Foundations and young Provinces are to feel at home and grow in the Spiritan family in harmony with their own background and culture (Chapter 1980: *Spiritual Life*, 108). Congregation and local Church enrich each other: the Congregation offers the local Church its religious missionary charism for mission; rooting in local Churches affords it new expressions of religious

and apostolic life while renewing its membership (cf. *SL* 123).

The Congregation made a beginning with Foundations in 1953 (the term "Foundation" itself came much later) when a Juniorate was opened in Ihiala, Nigeria. Trinidad was set up as a Vice-Province, with its own scholasticate, in 1961, after 28 Trinidadians had been ordained abroad, and became the first southern-hemisphere Province in 1968. The attempt in the 60's to establish indigenous formation in Ontario later developed into the Province of TransCanada. In the early 70's, Foundations were created in Angola, East Africa and Brazil; in the late 70's in Puerto Rico, Central Africa, West Africa, Southern Africa, the Indian Ocean. In the last few years, beginnings have been made

in Zaire (1986), Mexico, Australia and Papua New Guinea, and Haiti, where, since the return, formation structures have been set up.

The principle of rooting within local Churches leads to a certain tension between mission and "home-base". All Spiritans are for mission – difficult and urgent pastoral situations, the poor and oppressed, especially transcultural mission. Some Foundations have thus sent most of their members to other countries and cultures. On the other hand, vocations often grow because there are indigenous members to identify with, the work itself of vocations and formation requires some indigenous input as well as the setting up of a self-reliant network for the care of missionaries and mission projects, the sick and aged... For these necessary works, Foundations retain some of their members or recall some after only a short period on mission. The delegates at Arusha considered that tension would diminish if the principle were established that in normal circumstances first appointments would last for at least three years. Agreement of the General Council and of the two Superiors concerned would be required to recall or transfer one on first appointment before the three years expired.

2.2 Mission – Different Approaches

"Our practice of religious life takes on different forms among different peoples or in various cultures" (SRL 55).

"The intention is not to form a 'block', rather it is a question of a different approach to mission" (Indian Ocean Foundation team in PNG).

The gifts of faith and love call for gratitude; one way of expressing gratitude is by handing on the faith. The missionary Church is missionary by her very nature (AG 2). "The heavens declare the glory of God... day discourses of it to day, night to night hands on the knowledge" (Ps. 19:1-2). Missionaries bring with them the riches (and sometimes also some of the failings) of their local Church. Missionaries from South to South may be better able to help their people take on greater responsibility for their Church. They may be a bridge helping people to accept and work well with their own clergy and other pastoral workers.

A confrere in Brazil writes: "Our formation, whether we like it or not, makes candidates, many of whom are of popular origin, pass through a process of secularization and a loss of culture, and introduces them to a secure life ..." In Latin America, there is a search for a new way of being Church, and a religious life nourished from the same popular religiosity and inserted within the same conditions of life as the majority of the poor. The Latin American approach is a variation on a common theme in the Foundations.

2.3 The Treasure of the Nations (cf. I/D 25, Feb. 1980)

More than ever before, we appreciate the Christian originality of different local Churches. Latin America, for example, is enriching the entire Church with her basic communities and theology of liberation, her commitment to the poor and sense of popular religion. Africa is beginning to share her sense of God, her enthusiasm for the Bible, her strong sense of community and celebration, her involvement of the laity in mission and pastoral work. Asia is contributing her sense of the sacred, her love of silence and contemplation, her tried methods of asceticism. The older Christian traditions of Europe and America present to the younger Churches a long history of missionary zeal, models for faith seeking understanding, various currents of Christian spirituality, approaches to the challenge of "modernity" and a patrimony of Christian saints, men and women who bore courageous witness before the challenges of their own times.

2.4 Preserving Identity

Identity should find some expression in a mission project. A Foundation loses identity and would become a structure for formation alone if all those who have completed formation were distributed in the Districts. It is therefore recommended that each Foundation and young Province have at least one mission specific to it. Care will be taken as soon as possible to train indigenous formators, for these will more easily inculcate formation, embedding it in the deep values of their people.

"Migration" is a problem which some Foundations face; that is, students are continually on the move from one house of formation to another located in different countries. As a result, some never have the rooting of a period of formation "at home". The Saverne meeting (June 1986) of African Foundations and Provinces suggested that, to the extent possible, Postulancy and the First Cycle should be "at home", a suggestion to be applied with great flexibility given the complexities of the situation and the shortage of means and personnel.

There have been regroupings for formation in order to save costs and avail better of scarce personnel. Nigeria Province and the West African Foundation collaborate in theology; Zaire shares philosophy and theology with the Central African Foundation; Angola has all its own structures of formation but sends some students in the Second Cycle to the theologate in Brazzaville (FAC). France and USA/E collaborate with Haiti; Switzerland (previously England) shares its theologate with the Indian Ocean Foundation. There could perhaps be greater ex-

of different nations and cultures, such that members of the Foundations live interculturality right from the start. Both during O.T.P./Prefecting and on the mission, members of the Foundations now live side by side with members of the Districts. Increasingly, apostolic groups and the Districts themselves are becoming multi-cultural.

The question was therefore asked whether Districts will have to dissolve whenever a Foundation becomes a Province, or what shall be the model of relationships. Two models have emerged. In one model, there is a fusion of circumscriptions to create one Province (Angola, the forthcoming Brazilian Province). Members of the District opt for the new Province, either as Province of Origin or as Province of Appointment (SRL 159.2 and 160.3). In the other model, the District does not cease to exist as a jurisdiction; it retains its mission project while supporting the initiatives of the new Province (Nigeria, East African Province). These models came to be through discussions between the concerned parties in dialogue with the General Council; within each model concrete differences exist.

Communion will be better fostered if care is taken right at the start of a Foundation to involve all members of the District(s); it is not an affair of Superiors and Formators alone. Recruiting, screening, apostolic work, prefect-

ing/O.T.P., holidays are some of the opportunities for involving members of the District(s) in the development of a Foundation; they also make for fraternal contacts between them and the members of the Foundation. After the emergence of a new Province, frequent meetings of the Superiors concerned will ensure that Spiritan presence and apostolate in any area is planned in common.

Looking towards the future, most of the delegates at Arusha expressed the wish that, wherever possible, only one Spiritan circumscription be established in any given area. In its animation, the General Council will incline towards this while continuing as before to listen carefully to all concerned. Formal cooperation in the apostolate is certainly a requirement of mission and helps our internal unity. However, without a conversion of heart structures alone will not produce unity, hence the need for intercultural understanding.

4.2 Questions for Reflection

Q.3 In what concrete ways may we promote the bonds which unite all Spiritans?

Q.4 How may the structures evolve in order to take account of the new realities described?

5. Intercultural Understanding and Communication

The mass media, especially the television, bring home to us the various ways of being of different peoples. Multinational companies deal every day with cultural questions. They train staff to work in foreign cultures; they develop cultural criteria for production, sales and relations among personnel. There has never been such a movement of peoples as in recent years; most mega-cities have become microcosms with a plethora of cultures.

As missionaries we often find ourselves in transcultural situations; we have to learn to relate to, and work with, people different from us. Some of our communities are multi-cultural. Experience with the Foundations has underlined these factors and helped to alert the Congregation to intercultural problems and possibilities, making it pose more insistently for itself questions being posed in this area all over the world.

Cultures are different not only on the level of customs and usages but also in ways of experiencing deeper human desires and quests. Persons and groups have their particular histories of sin and grace, their lawful goals and aspirations.

Some of our circumscriptions have members belonging to different cultural/national groups; in some the larger part of the membership belongs to one cultural group. An atmosphere of fraternal love and dialogue enables group "feelings" to be expressed and dealt with in the context of communion. Christ "the peace between us has made the two into one..." (Eph. 2:14). We all serve the mission of the Church, which in Christ is a sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all humankind; also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity (LG, 1).

True intercultural community will require constant re-examination of our group attitudes. Intercultural understanding and communication will become increasingly necessary to our life and mission. Superiors, as "men of dialogue" (SRL 47.2), need to acquire such skills; our communities will need structures for cultural dialogue. Familiarity with one another's languages and cultures becomes more necessary (at least the main languages of the Congregation). Confreres and circumscriptions are invited to invest more in this area. The General Council recommends the training of some confreres in questions of culture and intercultural relationships.

changes in formation between the European and North American Provinces and the Foundations.

Number is another aspect of identity: at the point of becoming a Province, a Foundation would normally have that proportion of indigenous members to give it local colour and assure their equitable participation in decision-making.

3. Transition to Province Status

A Foundation is initially placed under the care of a number of Principal Superiors who act collegially. Some Foundations and emerging groups are, however, cared for by one District or circumscription.

In the name of the Congregation, the General Council thanks the Superiors of Districts who have added the care of the Foundations to their normal duties. We thank also the formators who have built solid foundations, and all who in one way or another have contributed to the up-building of the Foundations.

When the Foundation has reached a certain maturity, a Major Superior is appointed for it, and has a Council chosen according to the Spiritan Rule of Life. It will be ready to advance to Province status when:

- there are at least 15-30 finally professed members;
- there is a sufficient number of indigenous formators;
- necessary administrative structures are availa-

2.5 Questions for Reflection

- Q.1 *In what ways may the Foundations contribute to the new image of mission?*
- Q.2 *How far have we succeeded in effecting a meeting of faith and culture – in the Foundations and elsewhere? (SRL 16.1).*

- ble, and there are sufficient numbers with mission experience to fulfil administrative tasks;
- in a survey of indigenous members, about two thirds are in favour of a transition into one or more Provinces;
- a mission project has been worked out in dialogue with the General Council to ensure both a mission "ad extra" and a "home-base";
- the new Province by its own effort can meet at least 50% of its running costs; it is presumed that structures are in place;
- relationships have been agreed with the Superiors of neighbouring circumscriptions (in dialogue with the General Council) to take account of both the identity of the new Province and the unity of the Congregation.

The statutes of the new Province may be established before erection or, if not, at the first Chapter of the Province.

The above "orientations" were given by delegates at Arusha. They are very flexible and leave the General Council room for concrete decisions, in each case in dialogue with Superiors and all concerned.

4. Search for the Unity of Spiritan Apostolic Life

"Greater diversity in living the Spiritan vocation will make urgent a clearer definition of the essential links which bind us all together" (I/D 41, April 1986).

4.1 Spiritans are united in "apostolic life" (SRL 3), in the common dedication to the "poor", in readiness for tasks for which the Church has difficulty in finding workers (SRL 4), in the common project of the Congregation (SRL 55). Regions are structures of unity; so are meetings on various levels, especially those which would unite North and South (for example, the recent meeting of directors of novices: Dublin, July 1989).

Partnership in the apostolate is another aspect of unity. Just as members of the Districts devoted themselves to the development of the Foundations, so also now some members of Foundations cooperate in the mission project of the Districts. In some places, however, the pro-

ject of the District(s) and that of the Foundation overlap. In such cases, it would seem desirable that works gradually converge towards one mission project.

A novel situation is that in which members of the Foundations are engaged on certain projects (involving a District) for which a Foundation feels in some way responsible under the authority of the District. Such projects are usually elaborated in dialogue between the local Church, the District Superior and the Superior of the Foundation. Members of Foundations engaged on such projects belong fully to the District, nevertheless their particular situation requires clear guidelines to be drawn up by the Superiors concerned in dialogue with the General Council.

Multi-cultural communities and circumscriptions exist in parts of the Congregation. The Foundations are themselves usually an amalgam

6. The Need for Solidarity

"Share one another's burdens and you will fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2).

Our decentralized Congregation worked well as long as Provinces had enough people in formation to assure the continuance of their "works". Some older Provinces seem no longer in this position; some are calling for a "refoundation". The Foundations have grown partly through the solidarity of the entire Congregation. They are full of vitality, having many vocations, and are looking for mission projects. The needs of young and old call for structures of solidarity.

Financial solidarity has been increasing in the Congregation. *Cor Unum* distribution this year amounted to \$943,176, over 60% of which went to the Foundations and young Provinces. However, only about half of their requests could be met.

"Because we are members of one single missionary family, we take upon ourselves in solidarity responsibility for the Congregation's projects and priorities" (SRL, 21).

The Foundations were a big preoccupation of the last General Chapter. None of them has as yet a Capital Fund; most have no sickness or old-age insurance, and are unable to provide for their missionaries. In short, they depend for the most part on the solidarity of the Congregation. On the other hand, some Provinces have ample reserves; the situation calls for a more equitable distribution. The General Council is encouraged by the response to its call that five per cent of reserves be made available for the increasing costs of formation, especially in the Foundations.

Each Foundation has been given the task of evolving a plan for self-reliance within a reasonable period. Delegates at Arusha called for a coherent financial plan for the whole Congregation, a plan with channels to bridge the gap between rich and poor circumscriptions.

Personnel for formation is another area calling for solidarity. Over the next three years, the Foundations require 10 formators for pre-novitiates, 18 for First Cycle, 16 for novitiates, 3 supervisors for O.T.P./Prefecting, and 20 for theology – in all 67.

If the Congregation is to respond adequately, there may be need to establish a pool of trained manpower. In the meantime, suitable confreres looking for assignment are requested to consider the Foundations.

In solidarity, members of the Foundations will interest themselves in the "refoundation" of the older Provinces.

Delegates at Arusha requested the General Council to weight representation at the coming General Chapter in favour of the Foundations and young Provinces – this in deference to present trends in vocations. The General Council will have to devise a system which will take account of this while assuring equitable representation of the older Provinces.

6.1 Question for Reflection

Q.5 How may the Foundations participate in mission in the northern hemisphere and in the renewal of some of the older Provinces?

7. The Criterion of Mission

Our common commitment to evangelization relativizes somewhat the search for identity and for unity in Spiritan apostolic life. Since mission is our goal, we choose the structures (distribution of various circumscriptions, types of community whether multi-cultural or not, various models of relationships...) in order to advance that mission of the Church in which we participate, a mission which for us is true worship offered to God in the Spirit (*SRL* 87, cf. Rom. 1:9).

Whether in the Northern or in the Southern Hemisphere, the missionary should be careful not to establish a Church copied from the

Church of another cultural background, but an indigenous Church (*CDD* 419; *SRL* 16.2). He adapts to the life and culture of the people among whom he works; he identifies with their goals and aspirations.

Our missionaries who have laboured to establish the Foundations are justly happy to see them grow towards Provincial status. For them, this is a reward of labour. Their continued presence and commitment communicates the solidarity of the entire Congregation. In an apostolic spirit they are ready for the adaptations which may be necessary. New Foundations will try their best to assure the continuity

of those works of the Districts which are in accord with present Spiritan options in the area, without prejudice to any new initiatives they may wish to take.

7.1 Question for reflection

Q.6 How far do we as missionaries really identify with the people and their aspirations?

8. Conclusion: United in Mission

The decision to hold the Enlarged General Council in Arusha was a symbolic gesture. It was a call for a broadening of horizons and a change of mentality. The Churches of the southern hemisphere are bringing forth fresh but different expressions of our common faith. Within the Spiritan family, the Foundations and young Provinces seek to incarnate these diverse

expressions in the unity of our Spiritan apostolic life. We encourage them and give them a pledge of mutual respect and recognition, of solidarity and sharing of gifts. The challenge now is to work side by side as equal partners in the accomplishment of the one mission which has been entrusted to us.

References

AG – *Ad Gentes* – Vat. II Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity.

CDD – 1968 General Chapter Directives and Decisions.

LG – *Lumen Gentium* – Vat. II Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.

SL – *Spiritan Life* – 1980 General Chapter.

SRL – *Spiritan Rule of Life* – 1986 Constitution.

(The Draft was prepared by Fr. J. C. Okoye, Councilor responsible for Foundations, and discussed, amended and approved by the General Council.)

