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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

*T*he 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

*O*ur 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."²⁵ 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."²⁶

²⁵ Maynooth p. 117.

²⁶ 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.”²⁷

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

²⁷ 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”²⁸, 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.

²⁸ *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.”²⁹

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).

²⁹ *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.”³⁰ 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.”³¹

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.”³²

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.³³

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

³⁰ Bagamoyo 2.11.

³¹ Ibid.

³² John Fogarty, Pentecost Letter 2013.

³³ *Guide for Mission Appointment*, 2nd 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.”³⁴

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

³⁴ 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.”³⁵ Normally, formators are chosen in function of their international and intercultural experiences.³⁶

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.

³⁵ *Guide for Spiritan Formation*, n° 23.

³⁶ *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.³⁷

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.

³⁷ *Guide for Mission Appointment*, 3.3 (g).