

12-1-1999

## 1999 Vol. 56: Preparation for Mission Today

General Council

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### Repository Citation

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# INFORMATION DOCUMENTATION

C.S.Sp - Clivo di Cinna, 195 - 00136 Roma Italia

I/D 56

General Council

December 1999

## PREPARATION FOR MISSION TODAY

*This edition of Information/Documentation is the result of a reflection by the General Council on some of the insights that emerged from the General Chapter at Maynooth. During the Chapter, we realised how fast the world is changing. Over the past thirty years, mission as proclamation of the Good News of the Kingdom has acquired a new style - a style of presence, listening, sharing and dialogue. This new concept of mission calls for a different approach to missionary training. So these pages are intended to be a stimulus for all Spiritans, particularly superiors, formators and students, in their efforts to live out the spiritan charism in the light of the changed circumstances of today.*

### Statistics of the Congregation

*A breakdown of the professed members according to their circumscription of origin on 1 October 1999.*

Origin	Total	Bps.	Frs.	Brs.	Schol.
France	646	8	534	96	8
Ireland	495	3	461	21	10
Nigeria	359	2	195	7	155
Holland	205	2	167	36	-
Portugal	192	2	145	33	13
West Africa Foundation	130	-	58	-	72
East Africa	123	1	77	-	45
Germany	99	2	77	18	2
Central Africa	96	-	46	2	48
USA/East	87	2	81	1	3
Switzerland	71	-	69	2	-
Poland	68	-	52	6	10
Angola	66	1	37	1	27
England	54	-	52	1	1
USA/West	48	-	43	2	3
Belgium	47	1	42	4	-
Canada	44	1	39	4	-
Trinidad	39	2	32	1	4
TransCanada	38	-	38	-	-
Brazil	30	3	17	4	6
Indian Ocean Foundation	23	-	7	-	16
Spain	20	-	16	3	1
Haiti	17	-	3	-	14
Congo-Kinshasa Foundation	15	-	7	-	8
North-West African Foundation	10	-	3	-	7
Puerto Rico	9	-	5	-	4
Mexico	7	-	2	-	5
South Central African Foundation	4	-	1	-	3
Paraguay	2	-	-	-	2

### A. THE IMPORTANCE OF FORMATION

⇒ Although the theme of formation was not explicitly dealt with in the Maynooth Chapter, it was nevertheless present in an informal way in the thought and discussion of the delegates throughout the four strands which summarise our spiritan life: our mission, our life in common, our sources of inspiration and our collaborative ministry. Formation was repeatedly mentioned

*According to the statistics of 1<sup>st</sup> October 1999, the total number of professed confreres in formation is 470. Of these, 384 are from Africa, 45 from Europe, 33 from North America and the Caribbean and 8 from South America. There are also 143 novices and 217 non-professed students in first cycle.*

as a very important time in which our missionary vocation is taking shape and developing. The quality of our missionary commitment depends to a great extent on the quality of our formation. But it is equally true that our initial formation depends on the quality

of the missionary commitment of the whole Congregation. On-going formation thus takes on a crucial importance; formation continues throughout our apostolate, just as the apostolate continues throughout our initial and on-going formation.

⇒ Prior to Maynooth, formation was treated in depth at the Itaici Chapter in 1992. At that Chapter the need was felt to maintain a balance between diversity and unity in our spiritan family. While acknowledging the diversity in our human and religious backgrounds, it recognized at the same time that our spiritan history and charism and the needs of mission today call for a degree of unity in our approach to formation. So the Chapter asked the General Council, in dialogue with major superiors and formators, to draw up general outlines of formation for the Congregation. This dialogue resulted in the publication of the *"Spiritian Guide for Formation"* in 1997. It is because of this that Maynooth did not feel there was a need to treat the question again as it was discussed sufficiently when the Guide was being prepared.

⇒ After a year of contact with the rich and multiform reality of our mission and its problems, the General Council is aware that spiritan formation - initial and on-going - is one of the most important tasks facing the Congregation today. It involves the transmission of the spiritan charism, in all its simplicity and radicality, to those of subsequent generations who want to make it their centre of personal identification. In a changing world in which social well-being and consumerism are becoming the norm and in which young people are experiencing a certain instability, such a task is by no means easy, especially where it concerns a life-long commitment. We believe that the solution lies in the care and attention which circumscriptions give to the problems of formation. It also depends on the quality of the renewal and the spiritual and missionary witness of each Spiritan.

⇒ According to our Rule of Life, formation is the responsibility of the different circumscriptions. However, given the need for a better solidarity, organisation and rationalisation of human resources within the Congregation, the Maynooth Chapter gave the General Council more weight in matters of formation and entrusted it with greater powers of intervention (Maynooth 9.1). It is in this spirit that the General Council, having reflected on various questions relating to formation, now wishes to share these reflections and concerns with all confreres and to make some proposals.

## 1. *A new style of mission*

1.1. The views on formation expressed at Maynooth and the subsequent guidelines approved by the Chapter were based on the current vision that the Congregation has of its mission. The nature of our training is completely determined by our understanding of our mission. The Chapter reaffirmed that mission as the announcing of the Good News of the Kingdom has always been at the heart of spiritan life (SRL, 1) and it gave new emphasis to the evangelisation of the poor as our principal objective.



*Mission as presence*

*Fr Frezy Tam Tsi Kim (Indian Ocean Foundation) and Fr Chinua Okcke (Nigeria Province) with First Communicants at Malol, Papua New Guinea*

1.2. Contemporary spiritan mission is seen first and foremost as "presence". *"We go to people, not primarily to accomplish a task, but rather to be with them, live with them, walk beside them, listen to them and share our faith with them. At the heart of our relationship is trust, respect and love"* (Maynooth, 2.1). In other words, mission is an experience of sharing, involving the establishment of relationships; it presumes that the missionary has a capacity to relate and to focus on others rather than himself. The fruits of this approach are a change of heart and mind, a new openness to each other of both people and missionary and a sense of joint responsibility leading to common action.

1.3. For us, mission is a spirituality rather than a strategy (Itaici, 2.1). We know that the Spirit is the Protagonist of mission and of all our activities (Maynooth, 2.3). He always precedes us, so the role of the missionary is to discover the action of the Spirit present in the midst of the people to whom he is sent; it is a pilgrimage of discovery. We are called therefore

to live our missionary life, including our period of initial formation, as a journey of faith, listening to and discerning the voice of God.

1.4. Mission involves crossing cultural borders. As members of an international family, we give witness to the Gospel among peoples of diverse languages and cultures. The fact that our communities are becoming more international and inter-cultural is itself a witness to Gospel values. In some cases, young confreres could be given the possibility of doing their theological studies in the country for which they will receive their first appointment (Maynooth, 2.29). However, it is desirable that initial formation should begin in one's own culture.

1.5. Mission is a community project and should be lived in community. Maynooth strongly reaffirmed that life in community is an essential element of the Spiritan vocation: "All confreres will make a sincere and genuine response to the call to live in community" (Maynooth 4.1). Our life in community and the degree to which we genuinely share need to be periodically evaluated; confreres living together must also discern the will of God together. In the same way, the atmosphere in a formation community should prepare our young members for an authentic community life; it is there that they will discover the strength that can come from community prayer and the importance and richness of a sharing community for achieving a personal balance and a better service to mission.

1.6. Mission is solidarity with and being at the service of the poor; when seen in this way, Justice and Peace will be at the center of our mission. This calls for a simple and moderate lifestyle. Contact and work with the poor during formation should help young confreres to experience this solidarity in a concrete way and prepare them to live in an appropriate manner.

1.7. Mission is also dialogue with other religions and other ways of thinking and living. Special attention has to be given to Islam since it is so prominent in many places where Spiritans are working. Young confreres should be taught to be open to others and to acquire a capacity for dialogue which is so necessary in today's world. They should learn to appreciate those who are different to themselves without losing their own basic motivations and convictions.

## 2. A new style of formation

2.1. The new concept of mission needs a new approach to the formation process by which the young confrere prepares for the difficult and demanding life ahead.

2.2. The programme should seek a balance between its academic content and its spiritual and human aspects. In any case, a good theological training has to be based on a solid human and spiritual formation. Special attention will be given to the academic areas which relate more directly to preparation for mission. Our vocation is to be a pastor rather than an academic; professional qualifications should only be sought with a view to future mission following a process of discernment in community.

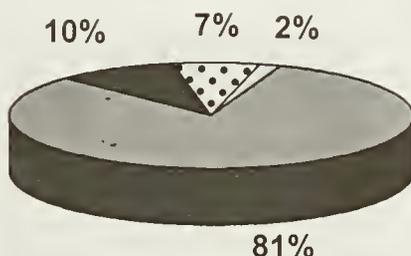
2.3. We conceive our missionary life and its period of preparation as a journey of faith, following Christ in his paschal journey and striving to conform ourselves to his likeness (cf. *Vita Consacrata* no. 65). There are some elements of this faith-journey which are of paramount importance: the living out of the paschal mystery; our life as a gift offered to God and

to the Church particularly in the service of the poor; listening to the Spirit speaking to us through the signs of the times. To this end, spiritual direction and formation in personal and community prayer are seen as an essential part of initial formation.

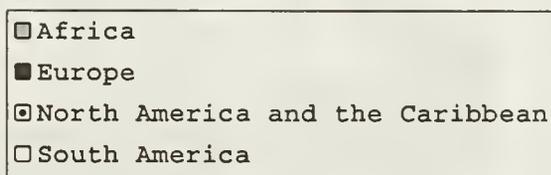
2.4 All members of the spiritan family should have a deep desire to live the charism of our religious family in a creative way. To bring this about,

those in formation should study and live out the spirituality of our founders while at the same time maintaining a constant contact with spiritan mission, especially in its commitment to the poor. When they come into contact with the problems of Justice and Peace, young Spiritans, through constant evaluation of their pastoral work, should learn how to analyse the mechanisms which favour and give rise to social inequalities and injustices at the local and world level.

2.5 Our training programmes will adopt more of an apprentice style, giving students opportunities to have personal experience of the reality of missionary life today. With a clear vision of what they are preparing for, they should allow themselves to be guided by



Percentage of students in the Congregation



the formators who will accompany their journey. The young confreres should be trained to be living witnesses of the message they preach. The process will be one of learning through experience.

2.6 Collaboration is an essential dimension of contemporary mission. We have been called to evangelise with others and in so doing, we become strengthened in our commitment as do those with whom we collaborate in the pursuit of common objectives. Very often and in many different ways, we work with lay people in fulfilling our missionary vocation. Moreover, in the Congregation today, we are experiencing a new phenomenon of lay people who are particularly attracted by our charism. They are interested in sharing our missionary vocation and the spirituality of our Founders. Therefore working with lay people should be a part of our formation process so that young confreres will be prepared to live and work with them in the future. In this way, any form of clericalism should be eradicated (Maynooth 5.15).

### 3. A new style of being formator

3.1. Another result of this change of approach and outlook is that the role of formator has also changed. A distinction must be made between a formator and a teacher/professor. Strictly speaking, formators are those who are trained in the skills for accompanying candidates and young confreres in their vocation journey and guiding them especially in making decisions. The *Spiritual Guide for Formation* underlines that to be trained as a teacher/professor is not a sufficient preparation for undertaking the role of accompaniment (SGF 75). While both roles are fulfilled by the same person in many of our formation houses, it is also to be acknowledged that all confreres working in houses of formation in whatever capacity, have a formative role. Thus the selection of formators and their training should be done in the light of the nature of contemporary mission as outlined above. The Maynooth Chapter referred more than once to the training of formators as a pressing priority. To undertake such a crucial role, it is essential to have a period of spiritual, theological and psychological preparation. But it is not just a question of academic study: the necessary skills for such a service can only be acquired through practical experience.

3.2. The choice and training of good formators should be a priority throughout the Congregation, but above all for the new Provinces, Foundations and Groups. Even though we are all imperfect and have our limitations, we still have our particular gifts. Future formators should be chosen from confreres who are still young, who are able to work in a team, who have had a rich missionary experience, who have qualities for relating and leadership and who through their simple and discreet witness can transmit enthusiasm to young people for the spiritual charism and mission. Paul VI reminded us that "*Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses*" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41); if this is true for evangelisation in general, it is even more so when it comes to the formation of future missionaries.

3.3. Formators should be a link between students in initial formation and actual missionary life, bringing to the houses of formation the witness of lived spiritual mission based on their own experience and on their contacts with other confreres in mission. They can also play an active role in the on-going formation of spiritual missionaries, giving input from their competence and receiving first hand information and wisdom from the field. Their position enables them to participate actively in research on contemporary mission, trying to discern from their reflection what are the new ways along which the Spirit is leading the Congregation, just like the scribe in the Gospel who becomes a disciple of the Kingdom of heaven (Mt 13, 52).



*The EAP novitiate, Magamba -  
in the background the Poullart des Places building*

3.4. Formators should see themselves as older brothers who, through their witness and presence, help

their younger brothers to discern the calls of God and to live the spiritan charism in a creative way. To build up such a relationship, an atmosphere of trust and availability, listening, respect, dialogue and transparency is indispensable. These attitudes display the richness of the spiritan vocation.

*“Formation is not just concerned with a specific period; it extends over our whole lives. Nor is it ever completed, for in each part of our lives, including our retirement, fresh calls are made on us, springing from new situations. Formation is an unending process”* (Spiritan Guide for Formation no. 9).

## B: PRESENT CONCERNS

In insisting that missionary training must be done with a view to contemporary mission and that the style of formation today should follow the apprenticeship model, we realise that it can often be very difficult to put this vision into practice. Many good things are happening already in various parts of the Congregation; in spite of severe limitations, many formators are doing their best to provide young confreres with a formation that is appropriate to contemporary mission. However, there are a number of concerns that we as a Council would like to share with you and which, in our estimation, need a joint effort in order to improve the quality of our training. These concerns come as a result of our contacts with houses of formation and from what we have heard from various regional meetings of formators.

### 1. The place of academics in our formation

Academic excellence is an essential part of our training as religious missionaries; in our specific preparation for ministry, either as brothers or priests, we follow rigorous academic programmes. We spend many years in this preparation at the end of which we are awarded various qualifications. Today, most of our seminaries are affiliated to universities. While this is important, it could have repercussions on the overall formation of our young members; there is a danger of over-stressing the intellectual content to the detriment of other dimensions of formation - the human, spiritual and

pastoral aspects. It is important to remember that formation deals with the integral development of the whole person and thus a certain balance is to be sought. Experience has shown that stressing one aspect to the neglect of the others creates an imbalance which is very difficult to rectify later on.

### 2. The shortage of formators

Formation is first and foremost a divine activity. It is God who calls each individual and commissions him or her: *“Set Barnabas and Saul apart for me to do the work to which I have called them”* (Acts 13, 2). But it is also a human process. God gives the growth but we have to do the planting and the watering. In accepting candidates into the Congregation, we have an obligation to provide them with an adequate and appropriate formation. The last two General Chapters have noted a growing shortage of formators throughout the Congregation. Indeed many of those we have at present are either untrained or essentially professors. This is a great challenge to all of us at our various levels of responsibility. The identification and training of future formators must be a priority for us, even at the expense of some of our current pastoral commitments.



*Spiritan Students of theology with Fr. António Laranjeira in Mexico*

*“Formation does not depend primarily on a discipline imposed by authority; such a discipline is incapable by itself of producing a total commitment and giving a lasting shape to a character.”*  
SGF, 10.



*Br Paul Ronssin helping young boys who are thinking of entering the seminary*

### **3. Enthusiasm and Commitment**

Mission is for us a life-long commitment. However, in recent years, and particularly at the Maynooth Chapter, it has been noted that some confreres, for a variety of reasons, seem to have lost their enthusiasm for mission (Maynooth 2.25). Perhaps this decline is partly due to a lack of updating in the presentation of the forms of mission that are suited to the situation of the world today. Therefore, there is a need to give special attention to our motivation in both initial and on-going formation.

In the past, confreres were appointed to a mission area where they would generally spend the whole of their active lives. Today we are experiencing the other extreme: a lack of stability or long-term commitment, on the part of some confreres, to a particular circumscription or mission area. Yet we invest so much time and energy in learning the language and culture of the people to whom we are sent; sometimes, this initiation period can last for two to three years before we are really able to do any ministry.

On first appointment, young confreres are assigned to a circumscription for a period of three years after which, through dialogue with the parties concerned, they can be appointed somewhere else. The General Council feels that this three-year period is too short and it should only serve as the absolute minimum. Let us remember that it takes a long time to get to know a people and to feel comfortable with their language and culture.

### **4. Large formation houses**

In practice, it is very difficult to apply the apprenticeship model of formation when formators are so few and in situations where the number of students is very large. How can we ensure a family atmosphere in big structures? Is it not the right moment to come up with a policy concerning manageable numbers in one house? Some Congregations have a threshold in the

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*“Finally, the question of brothers cannot be discussed without looking at our missionary history. The history has included some wonderful brothers, models of holiness such as we have all known...” (Itaici, 34,4).*

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number of students they will admit to any one community. Large numbers risk killing the family spirit. Should we continue to accept candidates without any limit? Is this good planning? Is there not a risk in such a policy of reverting to an impersonal and authoritarian model of formation that was sometimes practised in the past? In such cases, is it not advisable to think of rationalising the annual intakes, while at the same time planning creatively for an adequate solution, e.g. the creation of smaller units in the larger communities? A proper motivation and a long-term commitment to mission can be more easily developed when the numbers are not too large.

### **5. Formation Communities**

For us Spiritans, community life is an essential element in our way of living and of exercising our apostolate (SRL 28). But this does not happen automatically or miraculously; it has to be worked at. Students should be introduced to it from the start of their formation and in all subsequent stages. The *Guide for Formation* spells out that it is the duty of formators and the whole formation community “to lead every future Spiritan progressively into living in community, so that each may discover both the riches it brings and the demands it makes” (SGF 33). A good formation depends to a great extent on the quality of the community life. This quality is the result of mutual confidence and trust among the members who make up the community. A community will be what its members make it; in itself, it is formative when it permits each one of its members to grow in fidelity to the Lord.

#### **a) Special characteristics**

What is the nature of a formation community? Is it the same as other spiritan communities? Should there be separate communities in a house where formation is taking place? A strictly apostolic community is characterised by its apostolic activities; its main concern is the way it lives and programmes its active engagements. On the other hand, the main preoccupation in a formation community is studies and preparation for mission. Such a community is made up of young confreres in training and older confreres who are their formators. Young confreres are placed under the direction of formators so as to be helped in discerning their vocation and in preparing for ministry. Formators have the

role of initiating students into our spiritan tradition.

In its essence, a formation community is the same as that which is outlined in chapter 3 of SRL but with the accent on the “master-apprentice” relationship. The master, as with Jesus and his disciples, accompanies the apprentices closely to ensure that they learn all the necessary skills for their trade. For their part, the apprentices identify themselves with their master and enjoy many things in common. However, it goes without saying that the master has a certain responsibility for the apprentices. Formators have the duty to assist young confreres in discerning what is the will of God for themselves. They are their spiritual companions. Like those being formed, the formators also set out on a spiritual journey, trying to discern the nature of God’s call for each individual. Their task is to ensure the spiritual, intellectual and human development of those entrusted to their care. They draw upon their own experience of religious apostolic life and on-going formation and pass on what they themselves have discovered and received (SGF, 10).



*International Spiritan Mission Congress - SIST, Nigeria*

concerns the life of the community. Regular and well-prepared community meetings are significant elements in the whole formation process (SRL 44).

## C: PROPOSALS FOR ACTION

With a view to addressing the above concerns, the General Council has a number of proposals to put to superiors, formators, students and the entire spiritan family:

### *1. The training of formators as a priority*

Regarding the shortage of formators, the picture is not altogether gloomy. Some superiors of circumscriptions and the General Council have already taken some steps to improve the situation. A good number of confreres are currently training to be formators so

within a few years the situation will be somewhat improved. During this summer, the Pan-African Region organised a short course for formators at SIST in Nigeria.

- The General Council will be ready to give financial assistance to Provinces, Foundations and Groups for the training of confreres for formation houses.

- The General Council, in dialogue with the relevant superiors, is willing to consider making a first appointment to a circumscription with a view to releasing for training another confrere who has been identified as a future formator.

- In view of the need for long-term planning and co-ordination in the area of formation, the General Council has decided to re-establish a Secretariat for Formation at the level of the Generalate. A full-time Secretary will be appointed to fill this post.

### *2. International meetings of formators*

Formators need to come together from time to time to share experiences, to discuss problems relating to formation and to plan common strategies for the



*International Spiritan Meeting, Cameroun*

### **b) Participation in decision making-processes**

Formators should help to create a family atmosphere of simplicity and liberty where each one can speak out freely, an atmosphere where young confreres can raise any matter that is open to question (SGF 24). As in any spiritan community, formators are to make sure that students participate in the decision-making processes. Regular community meetings provide a forum where the community members can discuss all that

future. At present, such meetings are taking place at regional level. While we encourage this, we also feel that, once in a while, it is good to bring them together in a wider international context. It will help them to get to know each other better and such gatherings can benefit from the contribution of visiting experts. A well-prepared international meeting of this sort can be very profitable and formative for those attending it, even if it inevitably involves problems of organisation, language, and finance. These gatherings could be organised on the basis of the different levels of formation - novitiates, postulancies and scholasticates. For its part, the General Council intends to take some initiatives in the near future to bring formators together in order to evaluate the *Spiritans Guide for Formation* and other aspects of our formation which need to be reflected upon.



*Some of the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle students with Fr. José Maria de Sousa, at Pinheiro Manso in Porto, Portugal*

### **3. Collaboration and exchange between Regions**

There are several ways in which circumscriptions can help each other in the area of formation; for example, the regrouping of students, the exchange of personnel and the training of formators. Collaboration within a region and/or between regions can often be the best way of providing solutions to difficulties that are beyond the capabilities of individual provinces, foundations or groups. The present practices of circumscriptions in a region pooling resources, bringing students together and founding common formation programmes are all to be commended. Such collaboration will eventually lead to a better quality of formation (SGF, 81). We also encourage the exchange of formators and students from different regions. The Pan African Conference of Major Superiors and Formators, following the orientations of the Enlarged General Council at

Dakar, has taken seriously the question of the training of formators. Two centres for research and animation have been established in Africa: the Spiritan Centre for Mission and Spirituality at SIST, Nigeria, and at Bagamoyo, Tanzania. Another such centre has been proposed for Francophone Africa. Courses for the formation of formators will be offered as part of the programme.

### **4. Gatherings of Young Spiritans**

The Maynooth General Chapter decided that the period between February 2, 2002 and Pentecost 2003 would be a special Spiritan Year for the Congregation. In 2002, we shall celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Fr. Libermann and the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death; in 2003 we will be marking the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of our Congregation. This Spiritan Year is

seen as a time of jubilee, an occasion of sharing and celebration throughout the Congregation. It should also be a time when each circumscription examines itself in the light of the characteristics of a jubilee - conversion, liberation, and forgiveness; in other words, it can be made into an occasion of renewal for the entire Congregation.

The Council would like to invite each region to organise meetings of young Spiritans, either during the great Jubilee Year and/or during the Spiritan Year. Young confreres could be invited to give their own views about what the Jubilee or Spiritan Year means for them. A synthesis of those reflections would be sent to the Gener-

alate for subsequent communication to the entire Congregation. (The General Council will soon propose a theme for reflection to all confreres). The Spiritan Region of Europe has already planned a meeting of young Spiritans in formation which will take place in Belgium next April.

## **CONCLUSION**

Although much of what is said above refers explicitly to the area of initial formation, it is nevertheless addressed to all confreres, especially with a view to our on-going formation. It is meant to help us all to update our response to God's continuing call, in faithfulness to our spiritan tradition and in openness to the changed forms of contemporary mission. We have tried to avoid re-writing the *Guide for Formation* in which the specific objectives and characteristics of spiritan formation are clearly elaborated.