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11-1-1999

Spiritan News, No. 129

Congregazione dello Spirito Santo

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Repository Citation

Congregazione dello Spirito Santo. (1999). Spiritan News, No. 129. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-news-en/135>

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SPIRITAN NEWS

November/December 1999

N° 129

CONGREGAZIONE DELLO SPIRITO SANTO - CLIVO DI CINNA, 195 - 00136 ROMA

NEWS FROM CIRCUMSCRIPTIONS

PAN-AFRICAN EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCES

When sixteen Spiritans from the four corners and middle of Africa sat down in Arusha, Tanzania, from 30 August to 3 September 1999 to exchange their experiences and views on the formation of Spiritan seminarians in Africa, they were not far from the snows of Kilimanjaro nor from agreement that the same human nature is pretty prevalent among seminarians in all their countries.

Participants

Gabriel MBILINGI.....	Generalate
Jeronimo CAHINGA.....	Angola
Gerard NNAMUNGA, C. Mark Odeny, E. Shayo, B. Kishoto and P. Asenga.....	EAP
Damien MEKI	FANO
Noel PERROT and Philip RIVALS.....	FCK
Mark WHELAN.....	FOI
Remegius ONYEWUENYI.....	Nigeria
Ferdinand AZEGUE and Lambert NDJANA.....	PAC
Paddy DUNDON.....	SCAF
John KWOFIE and Gabriel LUSENI.....	WAF

This was their 8th meeting and the Silver Jubilee since their group was started in 1974. These meetings have taken place in different countries and were on different aspects of the same overall subject:

DATE	PLACE	SPECIAL CONCERN
1. 1974	Nigeria	Being Truly African and Truly Spiritan
2. 1976	Cameroun	Current matters
3. 1986	France	Current matters
4. 1988	Kenya	Inculturating Vow of Poverty
5. 1990	Brazzaville	Vow of Poverty in Houses of Formation
6. 1993	Ghana	Formation and Mission
7. 1995	South Africa	Structures of Formation in Light of Africa Synod
8. 1999	Tanzania	Formation of Formators

Over the quarter of a century of their meetings, there has been notable progress and expansion in a number of areas.

ORIGIN	Bps	Frs.	Brs.	Jun. Prof.	TO-TAL
Angola Province	1	37	1	27	66
Central Africa Province	-	46	2	48	96
Congo-Kinshasa Foundation	-	7	-	8	15
East Africa Province	2	77	-	45	124
Indian Ocean Foundation	-	7	-	16	23
Nigeria Province	2	195	7	155	359
North-West African Foundation	-	3	-	7	10
South Central African Foundation	-	1	-	3	4
West African Foundation	-	58	-	72	130
TOTAL	5	431	10	381	827

Postulancies

A factor in formation that is now receiving considerable attention is the emphasis presently being placed on postulancies. There is now one or more in almost every jurisdiction of the congregation in Africa. Why? One reason is that formerly almost all our major seminarians came from junior seminaries. In at least some areas, very many now come from government secondary schools where they received little or no religious education or formation before they started their philosophy studies. A few participants at the formators' meeting stated that some students do not really know why they are there.

Participants reported that the WAF has 4 postulant programs, IOF has a postulancy on each of its 3 islands, FANO has one, PAC has two, SCAF has five, Angola has one with 30 postulants and Nigeria also has one with 44 postulants.

Not much is happening about brothers. Angola has a few, but there are no special structures to train them as brothers. Nigeria also has some and the Province requires the same qualifications of them as for future clerics.

OTHER PROBLEMS

Financial problems are normal but for some they are particularly pressing. Our confreres in Angola have to pay between \$5,000 and 6,000 a ton just to transport maize by air from Luanda to Huambo where the seminary is located. The town is often bombed and the growing fields are mined. However, despite all this, there is still good progress.

Amongst the formation problems raised by one or more of the delegates, we heard that many students are fearful of sharing openly about their real selves. Some do not trust their formators but they can change with the passing of time. It can be useful to exchange seminarians and formators between jurisdictions. Relationships seem to be stronger when working in small groups. It seems a good idea to call occasional meetings with an agenda of simply sharing views and attitudes. It is possible, as the delegates experienced, to find one or other seminarian who sees training for the priesthood as a springboard to fulfilling some other ambition. It is also possible to find formators who are strangers in their own house. Although formation can differ according to the changing situations in our missions, there must remain some non-negotiable limits. One crucial problem that also needs attention is the use of freedom among seminarians. Some yearn for more and more freedom and independence until they feel they no longer need any guidance.

It was observed that European formators are leaving their posts at an alarming rate, even though they are able and welcome to help form seminarians in today's Africa. It was proposed that the Generalate appoint a Secretary General for Formation.



Some of the participants at the Pan African Meeting in Arusha, Tanzania

The meeting concluded with participants visiting Bagamoyo which has been designated as one of the two Spiritan Spiritual Centres of the Congregation in Africa; it is situated on the spot where the evangelisation of this part of the continent began. The next meeting will be in 2002 at a venue yet to be decided.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE NIGERIAN PROVINCE

Opening: The Assembly took place from 16th to 20th August 1999 and started with Mass celebrated by the Bishop of the Diocese of Enugu. This was followed by a day of Recollection given by the provincial of the Claretian Missionaries, after which there was a talk on community life and community discernment by the former Superior General of the Mercy Sisters.

Focus: Being a general assembly, the focus was to examine how the decisions of the last Chapter were implemented and to make recommendations to the incoming administration on the way forward. They also discussed current issues and problems, like formation, self-reliance and regionalisation of the province.

Attendance: The assembly was very well attended. Since it was a general assembly it was open to all members both at home and in the missions abroad. Some confreres who were home on leave from the missions also took part. There were about 106 confreres in attendance. Of this number, around 20 were from outside missions. The meeting was lively, and the debates sometimes hot, especially in the areas where sensitive matters were being discussed. But all in all it was fraternal.

Topics discussed: Three topics took most of the time of the assembly: **formation/mission, self-reliance and regionalisation.** Participants were very concerned about life in the houses of formation. After a long and heated debate it was agreed that a lack of sufficient well-trained and experienced personnel as well as the new mentality of young people can explain many of the problems being experienced in the houses of formation today.

On mission and apostolic life, participants spoke about the

lack of personnel in the home base and how they are not meeting the expectations of the dioceses where they are working because they are either living alone or they do not have enough personnel in the mission to do a good job.

They examined thoroughly all the self-reliance efforts of the province undertaken so far and made various recommendations. It is interesting to note that almost everybody who spoke on this subject was insistent that more personnel be deployed in this area, quoting various General Chapters that have insisted on self-reliance.

The question of regionalisation is another topic that was very hotly debated in the general assembly. The various letters of the General Council on this matter were read to the assembly as well as other interventions. At the end participants had to vote in order to reach some decisions.

The method used was like the method used at Chapters. Confreres worked in commissions and then came back to general assemblies and voted on propositions. It was thus that they arrived at the various recommendations that were made for the incoming administration to follow.

A comprehensive report was presented by both the Provincial and the Provincial Bursar and there was input by some designated confreres on topical issues to assist them in their deliberations at the assembly.

Elections: The assembly was an elective one and Fr Luke Mbefo was chosen Provincial at the first ballot with more than two thirds majority. The following were elected as Councilors: Fr Gabriel Ezewudo, Brother Joseph Mbah, Fr Remigius Onyewuenyi, Fr Josephat Ezeanolue and Fr John Anyaegbunam.