

I. INTRODUCTION

“In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19).”¹

In the light of the Second Vatican Council, Christians have a keen awareness that mission is not a particular activity in the Church, but is its essence. Each one, according to his/her charism and situation, in a Church recognised as “the People of God”, is co-responsible for announcing the good news of Jesus Christ.² Laity³, in virtue of their situation “at the heart of the world”, see themselves with an eminent role in this duty of evangelisation and are given as their territory: *“the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, but also the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media. It also includes other realities which are open to evangelization, such as human love, the family, the education of children and adolescents, professional work, suffering.”⁴*

At the start of the 21st century, we recognize that the charism is not the property of an institution but a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church. The Lord’s Spirit is continually opening new ways for mission to be shared reciprocally with the laity:” *Today, often as a result of new situations, many Institutes have come to the conclusion that their charism can be shared with the laity. The laity are therefore invited to share more intensely in the spirituality and mission of these Institutes. (...) a new chapter, rich in hope, has*

¹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 120, 2013.

² Cf. John-Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* Chap. III, 1988.

³ In this document, “Laity” reflects the definition given in the Catechism of the Catholic Church 897 and *Lumen Gentium* 31, which states : *“all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church.”* Therefore, this guide does not refer to the Spiritan brothers (who are *canonically* lay persons). However, occasionally, non-professed ordained ministers (deacons or priests) may belong to a group of Lay Spiritans; in that case, the guide also applies to them in the reality of their situation.

⁴ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 70, 1975.

begun in the history of relations between consecrated persons and the laity."⁵

The association with us of lay men and women in diverse ways belongs to the tradition of our Congregation. From the foundation of the Seminary of the Holy Spirit, we find collaborators who participate in the running of the house and vow themselves to poverty and community life according to the Rule (there were then no private vows for either clerics or laity). Fr. Libermann admitted Dr. Brunet to join the mission to Reunion. Later, this is more formalised: the Constitutions of 1875 recognise two kind of membership: "*affiliés*" and "*agrégés*". In 1895, at the request of Mgr. Leroy, the General Council approved the principle of admitting married laity as associates.⁶

After Vatican II, the wish expressed by certain lay people to participate in the missionary work and prayer-life of Spiritan communities was taken as inspired by the Spirit.

Since 1968⁷, each General Chapter encouraged initiatives in this matter, assigning to the circumscriptions the task of giving them a structure and thus facilitating reflection on the matter in the Congregation.

The 1987 SRL states that the Congregation welcomes "with joy" these collaborators and invites them to share the two basic elements of our vocation: our spirituality and our apostolate, with this commitment being confirmed by a written Agreement (SRL 24.3; 246.1.19).

The Chapters of Maynooth (1998) and Torre d'Aguilha (2004) find in the "branch of the Spiritan tree", which is the laity, three main shoots, according to the forms of commitment and participation in the

⁵ John-Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* 54, 1996.

⁶ Cf.: Henry Koren, *Spiritane lay associates*, in : *Essays on the Spiritan charism and on Spiritan history* . Spiritus Press, Bethel Park, USA, 1990, pp 89-97.

⁷ Cf. Directives and Decisions 14b, 1968-69.

common mission: support for missionary work; spiritual companionship; life commitment.

Finally the Bagamoyo Chapter (2012) adopted the term ‘‘Lay Spiritan Associate’’ and suggested moving from the notion of ‘‘contract’’ (which is juridical) to the category of ‘‘covenant’’ as being more dynamic, spiritual and anchored in human experience. This same assembly requested the elaboration of a guide to clarify the status of lay people in the Congregation and which would define the forms of association.

The Congregation today values this rich heritage and recognises the challenge of managing diversity⁸ so as to finally arrive at a common vision. This *Guide*, being both inspirational (2. Vision – 3. Mission) and structural (4. Forms of engagement – 5. Formation – 6. Organisational elements), seeks to contribute to meeting this challenge.

⁸ Cf. Bagamoyo 2.13. In this diversity we can also include volunteers, youth groups, alumni, benefactors, etc.; they constitute potentially other forms of association, requiring creativity and openness, and we can see here a call of the Spirit. However this guide is directed towards organized groups as defined in 4.2