

IV. FORMS OF ENGAGEMENT

“Spiritans laity are a branch of the Spiritan tree.” (Torre d’Aguilha 11.2)

“Terminology defining the various forms of relationship in the Congregation shall be included in the Guide.” (Bagamoyo 2.14)

4.1 The Congregation of the Holy Spirit welcomes joyfully various forms of association, commitment, spiritual proximity and co-responsibility in mission with laity, young and old, men and women, celibates or married people.

4.2 At recent General Chapters, the Congregation has recognized three main levels of relationship within the Spiritan family:²⁰

- **Spiritans Friends:** organized groups that, in different ways, support our communities and collaborate in our mission.
- **Spiritans Fraternities:** groups of lay people who feel attracted by the spirituality of our founders and our mission, and who come together for prayer, reflection and action.
- **Lay Spiritans,** who feel a call to lead their whole life according to the Spiritan charism and show this by a deeper commitment within the Congregation. After a time of discernment and specific formation, they establish with the circumscription which welcomes them, a written Agreement (SRL 24.3; 246.1.19).

4.3 Whether it’s a question of one or other of the above categories, the links with the Congregation, the degree of participation in the apostolate, in community and in prayer take different forms. They also vary according to the project of each particular group, the missionary project of the circumscription and local circumstances.

²⁰ Maynooth 4.21; Torre d’Aguilha 11.2.

4.4 SPIRITAN FRIENDS

4.4.1 Spiritan Friends have in common a practical mission in a particular place, in an organized group, in collaboration with professed Spiritans and inspired by the living tradition of the Congregation.

4.4.2 They are set up in missionary groups, youth movements, volunteer groups, groups supporting vocations, etc. They can also form around a local community or a particular project.

4.4.3 A group can include in its project material support for the Spiritan mission, especially taking part in fund-raising efforts; however it cannot be created solely for financial purposes: it is always a place for sharing our spirituality and mission.

4.4.4 Setting up a group can be done by the laity themselves, by Spiritan confrères, by a circumscription or even by a Union. In any case, it is up to the circumscription (or the Union) to approve the group's existence and to always ensure its Spiritan identity.

4.4.5 Those in charge in a circumscription appoint a confrère to accompany the group.

4.4.6 The internal organisation, the specific objectives, conditions for admission, as well as the formation programme, are worked out by the group and must be approved by the circumscription council. It is a matter of collaboration, generally involving professed confrères, and in response to the nature and particular needs of the group.

4.4.7 If circumstances require it, the circumscription council, after dialogue with those concerned, can demand the dismissal of a member or even the dissolution of the group – or at least terminate its Spiritan connection.

4.5 SPIRITAN FRATERNITIES

4.5.1 Spiritan Fraternities are groups of lay people who, inspired by our founders, wish together to deepen their life as baptised people, support their spiritual development and so take part actively in the universal mission of the Church, in union with other members of the Spiritan family.

4.5.2 Each member of the Fraternities commits to living mission where (s)he is, according to the main principles of Spiritan spirituality and to work to develop in that particular local Church the sense of being part of the universal Church.

4.5.3 At circumscription level, local Fraternities are grouped in an association which works out its own statutes, its manner of functioning and which chooses its own leaders. It normally has a large level of autonomy in its manner of living; however, the setting up of local Fraternities and the association statutes are subject to the approval of the Spiritan circumscription council.

4.5.4 The leadership appoints a pastoral assistant, a professed Spiritan or a sister closely associated to our charism, to guide each local Fraternity and who takes care to ensure its Spiritan authenticity.

4.5.5 Conditions for admission are specified in the statutes of association. Generally, after a defined time of mutually getting to know each other, a person can ask for admission to a local Fraternity. The decision on this belongs to the local leadership, having consulted members and the pastoral assistant. Such an admission is the occasion of a special celebration, which allows each of the members to renew expression of their fidelity to the Holy Spirit within the Fraternity.

4.5.6 If circumstances require it, the circumscription council, after dialogue with the parties concerned, can require the dismissal of a member or even the dissolution of a Fraternity.

4.6 Lay SPIRITANS

4.6.1 The life commitment, which singles out “Lay Spiritans” and is made official by an Agreement, presupposes particular dispositions, clarified at circumscription level (SRL 24.3).

4.6.2 Some discernment criteria: maturity (to have reached majority according to the local norm); emotional balance; personal qualities compatible with the mission and community; a regular link of sufficient duration with a Spiritan community; references (from Spiritans, clergy, religious, lay leaders); financial autonomy; and, for married persons, explicit agreement of one’s spouse if they are not joining as a couple.

4.6.3 A trial period, allowing for accompaniment and mutual acquaintance, takes place within the group of Lay Spiritans, if such exists, with a reference Spiritan community and with the designated professed accompanier.

4.6.4 Entry to the formation programme is decided on by the circumscription superior and his council, having received the opinion of other Lay Spiritans and the accompanier.

4.6.5 Initial commitment is generally for 3 years; so also its renewal. It takes place at the end of initial formation. It is celebrated publicly during an appropriate liturgical ceremony and formalised by a written Agreement, which expresses a covenant, a spiritual link rooted in mission, without legal or canonical implications for either party (SRL 24.3).²¹

4.6.6 After a certain time, according to local practice, there can be a definitive commitment, which has no legal consequence for either party.

4.6.7 Every commitment, whether initial, renewed or definitive, is decided upon by the circumscription superior with

²¹ When available, examples of written Agreement will be found at the Congregation’s website (www.spiritanroma.org).

the agreement of his council, having received the opinion of other Lay Spiritans and of the accompanier (SRL 246.1.19).

4.6.8 A specific mission, entrusted to a Lay Spiritan can be integrated into the circumscription's project. In such a case, the details are worked out collaboratively. In many situations, the charism of the Congregation can be made present through everyday personal or group commitments (professional, voluntary sector, etc.).

4.6.9 A Lay Spiritan can at any time bring to an end his/her commitment: reasons for this are to be explained in writing. Likewise, the circumscription council, after consultation with the Lay Spiritans group, has the right at any time to dismiss a member, if circumstances require it. This decision must be communicated in writing to the person concerned.

4.6.10 A professed confrère is named by the leadership of the circumscription to accompany Lay Spiritans.²² His appointment is made after consultation with the group of laity. He does not exercise a leadership role, which belongs to a Lay Spiritan; his role is rather that of a friend, advisor, guide. He also seeks to maintain the Spiritan identity of the group and its cohesion.

²² Maynooth 4.23.