

Divine Word Missionaries SVD Brother Formation

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FINAL DOCUMENT OF THE ASSEMBLY ON THE BROTHER VOCATION AND PROPHETIC DIALOGUE

CEBU, PHILIPPINES – 12 JULY 2009

1. INTRODUCTION

We are “one body, many members” (1 Cor 12:12) and continue to pray in one Spirit that the heart of Jesus live in the hearts of all. “As a community of brothers from different nations and languages, we are a living symbol of the unity and diversity of the Church.” (Prologue).

From June 29 to July 12, 2009 the Second Assembly on the Brother Vocation in the SVD took place in response to a recommendation of the last General Chapter of 2006. One of its objectives was to deal with the issues which the capitulars felt the chapter could not deal with adequately –such as identity, formation and the professional training for Brothers. While preparing the assembly, the preparation committee attempted to put in a wider perspective the issues which emerged in the last General Chapter in light of the concrete experiences of the Society in the different zones.

Although the dwindling number of Brothers in our Society has become a grave concern, our Assembly also provided an opportunity to celebrate our vocation as a precious gift from God, enriching our Society so much in the past and present. The Society would not be what it is if there were no Brothers in it. Therefore, to renew the Brother vocation in our Society is a duty for all of us, Brothers and priests.

Every Brother in our Society is a living example of God’s grace and favour. Therefore, we listened attentively to several “Life Stories” from SVD Brother Delegates of the Assembly. They made us aware of how Brothers are living their vocation in order to make the Kingdom of God visible to others. By inter- and intra-zonal groupings, we extended our sharing to all participants of the Assembly as an experience of how and where we have experienced God in our lives.

According to the reports from the zones and the impressions of the participants, the recommendations of the 14th General Chapter, dealing with the results of the First Assembly on the Brother Vocation in 1994, have been well implemented in our provinces and communities. Brother-priest relationship have improved; leadership positions in the Society for Brothers have been granted as far as possible, formation of Brothers has experienced a shift towards the priorities of our Society; and the presence of Brothers in new mission initiatives has been granted by the Generalate.

Yet there is a great need to re-image the SVD Brother's mission in response to the challenges of our time (the impact of the global demographic decline of religious vocations, the emergence of a postmodern ethos due to the spread of a consumerist culture, the fragmentation of familial ties mainly due to rapid urbanization, etc.) and our vision of mission today. After evaluating secular, ecclesial and congregational factors that have caused the dwindling of vocations for the SVD (previously done by the zonal coordinators and the preparatory committee) we tried to focus on how we respond to this need to re-image the SVD Brother's mission.

II. MAIN TOPICS DISCUSSED

The following main topics are based on four of the main themes that guided the reflections of the 16th SVD General Chapter in 2006.

SPIRITUALITY: THE BROTHER AS WITNESS TO THE SAVING GOSPEL

No re-imagining of the SVD Brother's mission in today's world can be done without renewing his integral witness to the Gospel: first, by his responding to a personal call as a consecrated person; and second, by his doing through his mission-oriented profession within the charism of the community.

The best visibility for the Brothers is their own example as men of prayer and dedicated service. What they are counts more than what they do. Better yet, we must insist on a spirituality of service as a way of being. Brothers must provide a radical witness to Christ and to our SVD spirituality in light of prophetic dialogue. This renewed understanding of mission implies, among other things, four attitudes required in mission today: contemplation, respect for the other, humility and compassion.

It is primarily the consecrated life which gives expression to the charismatic dimension of the Church. Through the profession of the evangelical counsels, we follow Jesus more closely and, in doing so, give radical expression to the Church's call to holiness. Each of us, Brothers and priests, has been called to this holiness –a holiness which is rooted in our personal and in our common vocation to be a Divine Word Missionary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We recommend that, to give the religious and missionary vocation of the SVD Brother more visibility in the Church and society, the profession of perpetual vows be celebrated in the local church of the professing Brother.
2. We recommend praying regularly for vocations to the religious and missionary vocation in general, and for the SVD Brotherhood in particular.
3. We recommend celebrating June 16 (original founding day of the Society) as SVD Brother Vocation Promotion Day during which we pray for, and promote, vocations to the SVD Brotherhood.
4. We recommend reference should always be made to the Brother vocation when presenting our Society to the public.
5. We recommend that research into the life stories of Brothers from the founding generation be put in writing as part of our spiritual heritage.
6. We recommend the use of the media to publicize the missionary work and spirituality of Brothers.

COMMUNITY: THE BROTHER AS CONFRERE IN THE CONSECRATED LIFE

The Brother vocation is meant to be a *signum fraternitatis* –a sign of communion, a sacrament of brotherliness, a witness to solidarity, an invitation to dialogue. Through our vows we become members of a religious community. Hence, our community is our home, a place where we share life, faith, friendship and witness to the Kingdom of God. As we are gathered by God, we participate in God’s mission, we witness to God’s Kingdom, we portray the unity and diversity of the Church, we show people how to participate in mission in various ways. Brothers and clerics are called to enhance fraternity and team work within the SVD. By doing so, we show the proper identity of our congregation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We recommend that Christian fellowship in our communities be constantly nourished by regular Bible sharing (*lectio divina*).
2. We recommend that, as Brothers and clerics, we periodically plan and evaluate together our missionary activities in the light of our provincial or regional mission statements.

LEADERSHIP: THE BROTHER AS PARTNER IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The hierarchical structure of the Church can give rise to a clerical mentality that too often blocks equal and fraternal ties among confreres in community. Since consecrated life represents the charismatic dimension of the Church, it can serve as a complementary pole to the hierarchical structure of the church. These two expressions should complement each other. Therefore, as lay religious, the Brothers can readily enter into prophetic dialogue with our dialogue partners because they have fewer hierarchical constraints.

As a congregation of Brothers and clerics, we need to perform our mission bearing in mind that we are all co-workers in the vineyards of the Lord. Thus, in light of prophetic dialogue, the first call to conversion addressed to all confreres asks for a change of mentality and behaviour, since SVD Brothers are no longer “mission helpers” but “mission partners” in the Society. Therefore, despite our weaknesses in working together, in sharing responsibilities, and in associating others in our mission we need to be more aware of God’s presence in our midst and look forward to a better future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We recommend that every zone assess the need and possibility of having a coordinator for Brothers.
2. We recommend that the preparation of Brothers for specific leadership roles and specialized ministries be systematically planned.
3. We recommend that the generalate make efforts to appoint competent Brothers as members of AJSC-Steyl and VIVAT International.
4. We recommend that more Brothers who are qualified and competent be included in leadership roles at the zonal and generalate levels.
5. We recommend that a study on possibly lifting the canonical restriction against Brothers assuming major superior roles be done and submitted to the next general chapter for discussion.

FORMATION: THE BROTHER AS DISCIPLE IN PURSUIT PERFECT CHARITY

It is true that the missionary role of the Brother in our Society has not been fully worked out in light of recent developments in the Church and in the world, particularly against the background of the new understanding of mission as prophetic dialogue. Once this role is defined, starting from the first moment of initial formation, formators have the responsibility to create conditions for a candidate to develop his vocation in line with this role.

Indeed, this new vision of mission as witnessing to God's Reign through a four-fold prophetic dialogue marked by the four characteristic dimensions may offer us a valuable opportunity to develop non-priestly ministries and professions in the SVD which are more mission-oriented. We have to keep in mind that the Brother vocation is distinct from the priestly vocation. Therefore, the formation needs of Brothers are different.

In this regard, a solid spiritual formation is of utmost importance in the life of a Brother. He must make an enlightened commitment to the person of Jesus Christ who has come to witness to the Father. This will lead him to understand his mission and walk with Christ while serving the people of God. By receiving adequate academic formation, brother candidates should be able to see the link between professional training, consecrated life, and communal expectations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We recommend that, where possible, a team of SVD priests, Brothers and SSpS sisters promote our vocations.
2. We recommend an interprovincial workshop for vocation directors on the Brother vocation.
3. We recommend that those provinces without a Brother Formation Program develop one and present the final product to the Zonal Area Coordinator for formation by January 2011.
4. We recommend that all formation programs be regularly evaluated.
5. We recommend that the OTP/CTP be promoted for Brothers in temporary vows.
6. We recommend that, where Brother and clerical candidates go through a common formation, a time of specific formation for the Brothers be established.
7. We recommend that the Brothers' formation include a specially designed basic theological program.
8. We recommend that the professional formation of Brothers be geared towards the SVD characteristic dimensions in the spirit of prophetic dialogue.
9. We recommend that, wherever possible, competent Brothers accompany the formandi at all the stages of initial formation.
10. We recommend that, provincial and regional superiors include in their triennial reports to the generalate their activities concerning all the above recommendations.

CONCLUSION

As this second SVD Assembly on the Brother Vocation comes to a close, we call on all confreres, Brothers and clerics alike, to help in carrying out the above recommendations so that we may respond with a reinvigorated image of Brotherhood in fulfilling our SVD mission.