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"We can't row the canoe fast with one paddle"
(African proverb)

Coords-Link, July 31, 2010

Dear Fellow Coordinators,

Last July 7-9, 2010 the meeting of Zonal Coordinators with the Generalate was held. In this Coords-Link I would like to share with you the Annual Report of the AFRAM Zone with some modifications. It is a bit longer than usual but reading it might give you a wider view of our Zone. Unfortunately my visa for Italy arrived too late and I failed to attend the meeting.

The 2010 Annual Report of the AFRAM ZONE to the Generalate.

Latest events. Can you guess why the year 2010 is very significant for us in the AFRAM Zone? Most probably you are now thinking of the Football World Cup. For the first time ever it is taking place on the African ground. Yes, people from all over the world converge in South Africa to watch the matches and also to take the opportunity to see a part of the continent. I am thinking however of more important events. This year 2010, 18 of the 52 countries of Africa and Madagascar are celebrating their 50th anniversary of Independence. Until the end of the Second World War almost the entire black Africa was still colonized. The Great Britain occupied most territories in the East, France occupied most of the West and the Centre while Portugal occupied most of the South. The giant Congo was colonized by Belgium. Then progressively as the old superpowers declined the struggle for independence swept all over the place like a bush fire. The United Nations itself founded in 1945 was favoring people's self-determination. Ghana took the lead and got independence in 1957. In the 1960's more countries celebrated their liberation, freedom and sovereignty. Unfortunately the years that followed were marred by ethnic divisions, civil wars, dictatorships, coups d'états, corruption, abuses of human rights, etc. A confused old woman, unable to pronounce correctly this strange word "independence", asked her parish priest: "Father, when will this (*in*)dependence end?" The multinationals have found other means to continue exploiting the African countries. Many the local leaders became millionaires ignoring the plight of their people living in extreme poverty and ignorance. Despite all these, there were some signs of positive evolution. As an African proverb says: "From the pit where we throw the rubbish comes out a healthy banana tree".

In the SVD AFRAM Countries. Among the countries who celebrated their 50th years of Independence where the SVDs are present are: Togo, Madagascar, Benin, Chad and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Togo celebrated its 50th years of Independence last April 27. The newly elected president was sworn into office in a colorful festivity. Hopefully the democratization process takes its course amidst the protestations of the opposition. In Madagascar the celebration took place last June 26 without a president and without a constitution. The leaders and the people are divided as well as the international community. Only France was represented from the diplomatic circle during the festivities. The D. R. Congo golden jubilee of Independence last June 30 was honored by distinguished personalities: no less than Ban Ki-moon the General Secretary of the United Nations, the king Albert of Belgium, the king Mohammed VI of Morocco, thirteen heads of states and several other distinguished guests. The feast itself was a success though many would say: "It was their feast, not ours". It is true that employees were not paid, many are below poverty line and some regions of the country are not yet in security nor in peace. In August 1 it will be the turn of Benin. Then in August 11 Chad, where "Toumai" our 7 million year-old ancestor was found, will celebrate its independence from France. The SVD is therefore present in countries where much is still to be done. "We are where is the action is!" It is a tremendous challenge to think that we are taking active part in the history of Africa and Madagascar.

Other anniversaries. Aside from the golden jubilees we also celebrated the Silver Jubilee of the Province of Kenya-Tanzania. There was also the big feast of the 100th birthday anniversary of Bishop Joseph Bowers now residing in his mission country, Ghana.

In the Church. Last October 4-25, 2009 the Second African Synod was held in Rome. The theme “The Church in Africa in the service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace” is very timely as we look at the actual situation of the continent today. We can participate in the process of positive change by forming good leaders, promoting dialogue, participation in resolving conflicts and provide good education to children and youth. The Gospel must penetrate the hearts of the people that they respond to the call for conversion. We had invited the Archbishop of Parakou, Fidel Agbatchi and ex-Prime Minister Edem Kodjo, both participants of the Synod, to be our guest speakers for the Zonal Assembly.

Other news. Last June 20, 2009 Fr. Alex Thomas Kaliyanil, was named Archbishop of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. Then last April 10, 2010 Gabriel Kumordji was ordained bishop of Donkorkrom, Ghana. We are also happy that in 2009 the first SVD priests born in Madagascar and in Rwanda were ordained.

EVENTS IN THE ZONE

1. Strategic planning. Last January 7-8, 2010 the Provincial of Kenya asked me to facilitate what they called “Strategic Planning”. A group of twelve composed of the Provincial Council, the District Superiors, the members of the Bureau of Development and invited veteran confreres responded together to four questions: “Where we are now?” (our present situation), “Where are we going?” (our goals), “What do we have?” (our assets and potentialities) and “What do we have to do?” (our action plans). The results of the meeting provided materials for the Provincial Assembly held January 28, 2010.

2. VIVAT International. Last January 11-15 the members of VIVAT International and its associate members working in East Africa, Middle East and Egypt, gathered in Nairobi for the first time to know more about this NGO accredited by the United Nations. Three members of the board of directors from Rome and the two executive directors from New York gave the orientation and facilitated the Workshop. We SVDs should be aware that we are all members of VIVAT. With the other eight members we are more than 20,000 strong. We can multiply our strength in terms of influence by the number of people with whom we do our mission. Human rights broken into (1) poverty eradication, (2) women, (3) sustainable development and (4) culture of peace, are VIVAT issues where we are called to engage in. The provincial of SVD KEN-TAN Eusebio Manangbao has been elected chairman of the VIVAT East Africa. The Afram Zonal Assembly has passed the recommendation “That AFRAM JPIC seek ways and means to collaborate with VIVAT NAIROBI”. For this I beg Fr. General and his Council to support the Workshop of AFRAM JPIC Coordinators set for April 2011. We hope to involve the whole AFRAM Zone in VIVAT activities through our JPIC Coordinators. In the meantime the Fr. Provincial of KEN pursues the organisational aspect of VIVAT NAIROBI and informs our JPIC Coordinators of its evolution. A few days ago he wrote me that they are now in the final stage of the drafting of our VIVAT International Kenya Charter.

3. AFRAM Zonal Assembly. Last February 7-13, 2010 we held our 8th AFRAM Zonal Assembly. If we consider the 1990 as the year of the birth of the AFRAM Zone, then we are already 20 years old! Looking back the two main preoccupations of the Zone were Formation and Biblical Pastoral Ministry. It was reasonable because it is in formation where we can assure the growth of the new SVD missionaries from Africa and Madagascar. As to the Bible, we are simply responding to the hunger of the Word of God manifested by the people themselves. But years later the Zone was asked to “go beyond formation”, meaning to deal with other important matters that call for our attention. The take-off was not very easy. There were hesitations expressed. Nevertheless I think after a hurdle we made a break through as can be reflected in our new Vision-Mission Statement and in our recommendations.

- The Vision-Mission Statement underlined the importance of the fourfold Prophetic dialogue and the Characteristic dimensions. Six engagements are pointed out namely our simple lifestyle, the integration of JPIC values in our lives and communities, the formation of Christian communities, the

accompaniment of the poor, the sick, the faith-seekers, the refugees and HIV/AIDS victims, the Christian Education to our youth and the Contextualisation of our formation.

- In the Recommendations four out of seven were related to JPIC issues: that JPIC be promoted in other areas of the Zone, that JPIC coordinators collaborate with VIVAT NAIROBI, that the Zone collaborates with Africa-Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEFJN) and that superiors encourage confreres to work with the refugees. This shows that we have “gone beyond formation”. Two recommendations were related to Brother Vocations: that this remain to be a priority for the Zone and that a contact person for all Brothers in the Zone be designated. Since the provinces, region and missions do not have a structure for brothers in their respective levels, hence having no brother coordinators, the Assembly judged that it was not time yet to have an Area Coordinator for Brothers. Only the last recommendation dealt with formation: that formation houses initiate our formandi in financial matters.

4. AFRAM Treasurers Meeting. Like in the past Zonal Assembly the Treasurers’ Meeting took place simultaneously. We had joint sessions particularly when we touched topics concerning finance. Fr. Bernhard Rudolf himself came to participate despite his precarious health and we appreciated it very much. Some reports from the provinces were very informative and show how the challenge on self-reliance has been seriously taken. Instead of having an Area Coordinator for Treasurers the Zonal Assembly preferred to give the responsibility of organisation to the next hosting country.

5. AFRAM Formation Board. The 9th AFB meeting was held in Kinshasa, D. R. Congo last June 13-18, 2010. We discussed on the new document from the Generalate “Re-imagining the pathways of our common vocational journey” and pointed out the elements that could enrich the revision of the Handbook of the Common Formation Centers (CFC) which already needed updating. We examined further the project of opening a fourth CFC in Angola for those who want to study in Portuguese language. Moreover AFRAM is willing to send formandi to other countries outside the Zone who appreciate the African presence in their Scholasticate.

Aside from CFCs AFRAM has “common Novitiates” in Ghana for the English speaking and in D. R. Congo for the French speaking. Soon Angola will reopen its Novitiate. Hopefully in the future it could also accommodate other Portuguese speaking Novices. It is interesting to note that all the six AFRAM provinces and one Region have houses for Philosophy and Postulancy programs. The Zimbabwe Mission has already taken steps to restart. Mozambique Mission wants to inaugurate soon its formation program.

One of the dreams the AFB still want to realize is the exchange of Formators in the Zone. Hopefully with determined programming this will come true in the near future. Next year a month’s course for future Formators and current Formators who need basic formation is organized in Ghana. As we train more confreres there will be a wider choice of AFRAM Formators.

During our evaluation we saw that all the recommendations made by the previous AFB meeting were implemented though some still need to be carried on. We also appraised the implementations of the recommendations given by the Assembly on Brother Vocation (Cebu 2009) in our formation programs. The reports were positive and encouraging.

6. Lumko. The Director, Fr. Gabriel Afagbegee shared with me a report on the Institute. Here is an excerpt: The Institute now has a permanent at home. The property of five acres big situated in the suburb of Benoni, some 15 to 20 kilometres drive away from the Johannesburg (O.R Thembo) International Airport. It has 30 single rooms grouped into five blocks of six rooms each, a large kitchen and dining hall, a chapel and a conference hall that can seat plus/minus 80 people. There is ample land available for future developments such as building proper and adequate office and related blocks and accommodation facility for resident staff. With the arrival of Godefroid Manunga and Simon Nyirenda to join Raul Santos and Gabriel Afagbegee, the initial core team of four SVDs working at Lumko as stipulated in the contract between the SVD and the Bishops’ Conference, has been achieved. The SVD-Team faces a challenge – that of trying to live SVD community life and bringing our charism to bear on the work of the institute without, alienating or making non-SVDs feel unwelcomed.

SELF-EVALUATION AND PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

I have just finished my first term as Zonal Coordinator (2007-2010). I am just beginning my second term which goes until September 2013. Here are some appraisals of what I have done, what I have failed to do and some thoughts about the future.

- 1. Communications and Interaction.** I have tried to keep regular contacts with the provincials through the circular UPDATES and with the area coordinators through the circular COORDS-LINK. I had lively correspondences with Provincials, Regionals and Mission Superiors and we had profound and honest sharing of problems and preoccupations concerning their responsibilities as major superiors. I had good contacts with three area coordinators and less with two. Very often I communicate with the Communications Area Coordinator especially because of the AFRAM Website. Through www.svdafram.org we have reached a good number of people and some African confreres working in other continents write me. However my conscience is still bothered by the AFRAM Contact which was no longer in circulation since I was in office. If I had succeeded to communicate with the major superiors and the coordinators I think much more should be done to reach the confreres in the field. Another job description that I have not accomplished was the AFRAM Statutes no. 1.3.6.: “He maintains contacts through exchange and information with our SSpS sisters”. Do we have an SSpS Zonal Coordinator? Who represents the SSpS in Africa?
- 2. More engagement.** According to the Guidelines and General Principles for the Zones in the SVD the Zonal Coordinator should consider this task as “his main occupation and first responsibility” (4.3.1; cf. AFRAM Statutes 1.3.1). Due to our problems of personnel I have other heavy responsibilities. I hope that by 2011, as there will be a new triennium in the Province, I will be relieved of other charges and be more concentrated in the service of the Zone. I am planning for instance to make more research and reconstruct the history of AFRAM, gather and systematize the documents and complete the archives. As an African radio speaker used to say : “Un peuple sans histoire est un peuple sans âme” that means, “A people without history is a people without a soul”.

Faternally yours in the Divine Word,

P. Xene A. Sanchez, SVD
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