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

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## AFRAM UPDATE 0709, September 30, 2007

Dear Fr. Provincials, Regionals and Mission Superiors,

Sorry for this "eleventh-hour" report for September. There were just so many "happenings" taking place in the Province as well as in the Common Formation Centre where I am responsible. Today for instance, 14 young confreres renewed their vows. If we also count the confreres doing pastoral year in different places as well as those learning the French language, our community is actually composed of 10 nationalities: Angola, Benin, Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Philippines, Togo, Zambia and Zimbabwe! This rich experience of living together will certainly bring about positive consequences in the future of AFRAM and the SVD as a whole.

I share with you this time some points of the Generalate and Zonal Coordinators' meeting which took place in Rome last July 17-19. We were 18 in all: Father General and his council, the different Generalate Secretaries and Generalate Coordinators and the 4 Zonal Coordinators of ASPAC (Asia Pacific), Europe, PANAM (Americas) and AFRAM.

The first part of the agenda was the reporting of the Zones. Ample time was given for comments and discussions. I was touched by the interest of the Generalate and the other Zonal Coordinators on AFRAM. Questions were raised on the socio-political issues in our countries and the situation of the Church. It was noted that many places are moving towards democratisation. On the other hand we have serious problems of migrations, refugees and urbanisation causing brain-drain and loss of manpower. As we move to urban areas, where the population is moving, are we going to abandon the villages? As Islam is spreading in Africa are we open and prepared for inter-religious dialogue with it? How far are we involved in the education of the youth? Is the Zone in solidarity with Chad mission? These are some concerns that we share in common.

The ASPAC Zone is blessed with vocations in many countries with good formation programmes and a good level of sharing of personnel. The interfaith dialogue is developing well in the academic level and should go down to the level of ordinary people. It is composed of many countries considerably different from each other. Its advantage on the other hand is that everybody can use English for all communication. Many countries are already financially self-reliant and others are gradually working towards it. It is also facing problems of migration and urbanisation. The Coordinator is asking how the Zonal consciousness can attain the majority of our confreres. There seems to be lack of communication among us.

The EUROPE Zone has become more vast and diverse with the opening of the former Communist block extending as far as Russia. It is facing serious problems with lack of vocations. There are formation programmes with formandi coming from other continents. An

evaluation is on the process to know whether the results are positive or negative. Due to the decreasing number of confreres some provinces are joined into one and other provinces are thinking of following the example of the amalgamation of the two German provinces. What to do with the big buildings and structures? Can the Society continue to rely on the European Zone to support 31 Provinces that depend on Generalate subsidy?

The PANAM Zone is experiencing an influx of new missionaries coming from different cultures and continents. There should be an accompaniment to help them integrate into the Pan-American world. The confreres in the Zone are more involved in indigenous ministry. They have to find models for ministries which take into consideration the world-view of the people. It is interesting to note that the confreres are trying to develop a missionary profile of the SVD parish in the Zone distinct from diocesan ministry. Our four characteristic dimensions should be concretized in our pastoral ministry.

After the reporting there were other points in the agenda coming from the Generalate and from the Zones. I will talk about it in the next UPDATE.

I hope that by now you have already received the communication from the Generalate concerning the Workshop for the new Provincials in June 2008. Aside from the topics already established in the past workshops there are new topics such as: the techniques of planning, intercultural communication, the role of provincial secretaries and their relation to the Provincial Superior, the introduction of the Handbook for Superiors, personal skills of a Provincial, the importance of formalities (nominations, accountability, etc.) and the principles of administrative correspondence.

God bless! I'll be very happy to hear from you too.

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