

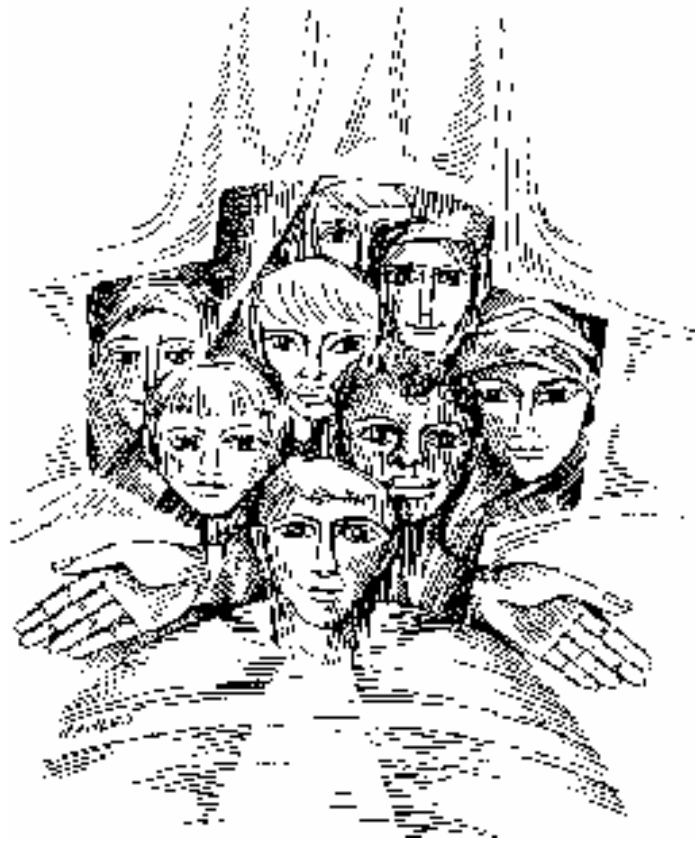
# **SURVEY ON BROTHERHOOD**

**January – March 2009**

**By**

**Bro. Alfonso J. Berger, svd.**

**Done among some male Religious-Missionary  
Congregations in Rome, Italy**



**“...you are all brothers” (Matt. 23, 8)**

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## Foreword

I am pleased to share with you the outcome of a short survey I did recently among some male religious-missionary congregations in Rome, Italy. The main purpose of this initiative was to somehow “widen” our horizons regarding *Brotherhood* in the context of the preparation of our *General Assembly on the SVD Brother Vocation*, which will take place in Cebu, Philippines, between 29 June and 12 July 2009.

This survey was carried out among five (5) *Lay* Congregations and ten (10) *Clerical* Congregations. This choice reveals two goals: on the one hand, to find out how do the so called “Lay Congregations” (according to Canon Law), deal with some Brotherhood issues (dwindling number of vocations, formation, mission, etc.). On the other hand, since our Society (SVD) is considered a *Clerical* Congregation, the number of *Clerical* Congregations consulted was higher (ten).

This report is structured in three main sections: the first reports on *Lay* Congregations; the second on *Clerical* ones and the third makes a *summary* of the common and major insights of these two groups for the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), and in particular, for its Brothers. I also added an *appendix* with some information about the preparation of the abovementioned General Assembly.

I take this opportunity also to thank sincerely all those who cooperated in this survey: some superior generals who, in spite of their heavy agenda, made room to share with me their opinions on Brotherhood. I also acknowledge the great collaboration received from other religious priests and Brothers. As promised, I am sending them the result of our common efforts too. May the Lord, whose call we listened by following Him as *consecrated* persons in our Congregations, bless us!

*Rome, 24 March 2009.*

.....  
*Bro. Alfonso J. Berger, svd.*  
*General Councilor*

Roma, 29 gennaio 2009.

Solo per e-mail

**Fra Donatus Forkan, fbf**  
Consigliere Generale  
Fatebenefratelli

**In re: consultazione al riguardo dei Fratelli FBF**

Stimato Donatus,

Sono il Fratello Alfonso J. Berger, dei *missionari verbiti (SVD)* ed abito a Roma da un po' di tempo. Lavoro da consigliere generale fin dal 2000. Ora, vorrei condividere con Lei che la nostra Congregazione sta preparando **un'Assemblea Generale sulla Vocazione del Fratello Verbita**, prevista per le prime settimane di luglio di questo anno nelle Filippine.

Nel processo di preparazione per questa assemblea, vorrei anche consultare altre Congregazioni sul tema dei **Fratelli** (come vivono la loro vocazione et missione nei tempi attuali, quali sfide devono affrontare e le proposte per rinnovare questa vocazione, etc.). Per questo vorrei, se possibile, parlare con un consigliere generale della vostra congregazione, oppure un altro Fratello que Lei mi raccomanda. A modo di condivisione, troverà in allegato una copia della **lettera circolare** del nostro superiore general, il P. Antonio Pernia, alle province/regione sulla preparazione al livello locale. (È soltanto per la vostra informazione).

Io sono un cittadino argentino, quindi parlo lo spagnolo. Anche, grazie alla mia formazione in Brasile, parlo il portoghese, oltre al francese (ho lavorato in Togo) ed al inglese (Generalato).

Mi farebbe molto piacere di contattare un Fratello de la vostra Congregazione a Roma per fare uno scambio d'esperienze sui punti elencati prima. Forse durante la settimana prossima, oppure più tardi, se lui non può farlo all'inizio di Febbraio. Sarei molto lieto de ricevere una sua risposta nei prossimi giorni, conscio che molte volte abbiamo un "sacco di cose" da fare!

**NB:** Quando Lei mi rispondesse, mi dica se preferisce avere alcune informazioni sui nostri Fratelli in *Spagnolo* oppure in *Inglese* giacché queste sono le nostre "lingue ufficiale". In questo senso, ho con me alcuni documenti, statistiche, riflessioni in formato *digitale* (PPS, PPT, etc.), le quali posso inviarli a Lei via *e-mail*.

Con saluti fraterni,

.....  
**Fra Alfonso J. Berger, svd.**  
[ajberger@verbodivino.it](mailto:ajberger@verbodivino.it)

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## Religious Congregations in Rome, Italy Survey done in January – March 2009

### Questionnaire – Guide for interviews:

1. May we know the current *membership's profile* of your Congregation?
  - a. What is the total membership: ..... (temp. vows: ..... perp. vows: .....) ?
  - b. How many of them are Bros? ..... (temp. vows: ..... perp. vows: .....) ?
  - c. During the last decade (1999 – 2008), how was the main “trend” of new Brother Vocations:  
- steady: .....      decreasing: .....      increasing: ..... (?)

OBS:

2. What do you think are some of the important *contributions* of the Brothers of your Congregation to the mission entrusted to your Congregation?
3. According to your experience, but also taking into account recent reflections on the situation of the Brotherhood in your Congregation, what do you consider the most important *challenges* related to the religious Brother's vocation?
4. What has your Congregation been doing to *address* these challenges?
5. Could you indicate if your Congregation has been taking any steps over the last years to request from the Vatican a change of its canonical status (e.g. from a “*Clerical*” Congregation to a *Clerical-Lay* Congregation)?
6. Have you perhaps some suggestions to offer in view of the upcoming *General Assembly on the SVD Brother Vocation*, scheduled for later this year?

Thanks for your cooperation!

Br. Alfonso J. Berger, svd.  
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## I – Lay Congregations

Among the variety of *Lay Congregations*, I focused on the following ones:

- *Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane (FSC)*, also known as *Lasalle Brothers*.
- *Fratelli Cristiani (CFC)*, or also known as *Christian Brothers*.
- *Fatebenefratelli (FBF) – Ordine Ospedaliero di San Giovanni di Dio*
- *Fratelli dell’Istruzione Cristiana (Ploermel) – FICP*
- *Fratelli Saveriani (CFX) – Xaverian Brothers*.

From this list, you can see an option for Congregations whose charism is related mainly to education, health care or Youth apostolate. Since a good number of our young Brothers are committed to one or another of these fields of work, I thought it would be interesting to listening to the experiences of Congregations that have been working in these fields for quite a long time.

Of course, the *work* field was not the only criterion for this choice. I was also interested to know *how* these *Lay Congregations* deal with topics like recruitment, leadership, community life and formation. In my interviews with their superiors or delegates, I could notice two major challenges: the *aging* profile of these Congregations and the *dwindling* of vocations over the past years. Certainly, the geographical factors and the specific works limit to some extend the entrance of new vocations. For instance, some of these Congregations were born and developed in Europe, Canada or USA. Now, over the past decades, there has been a great decline in vocations in these parts of the world, resulting in the progressive aging of these Congregations. Also, the fact that these Congregations had, and still have, specific mission fields (e.g. health, education), resulted in fewer vocations since not so many candidates have the “charism” to work with sick people, education, etc.

In these Congregations *leadership* does not raise *canonical* problems since they are considered *Lay Congregations*, composed of Brothers or of a large majority of Brothers (e.g. FBF). Besides, community life is very important in the witnessing of their consecrated life as well as their spirituality. A Brother is more than a teacher or a nurse: he is a *consecrated* person who, through his work and behavior, makes present the gratuity of Christ’ love for humanity. Therefore, precisely these Brothers need a solid spiritual foundation and a supportive community for their mission.

### 1. Some statistics of these Lay Congregations:

Congregations	Total membership	Perp. Vows	Temp. Vows	Trend of vocations
Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane (FSC)	5.025	4.624	401	Slightly Decreasing
Fratelli Cristiani (CFC)	1.301	1.190	111	Steady
Fatebenefratelli (FBF)	1.168 *	884	147	Decreasing
Fratelli dell’Istruzione Cristiana (Ploermel)	931	829	102	Decreasing
Fratelli Saveriani (CFX)	221	212	9	Increasing only in Congo and Kenya

NB: \* in the case of the FBF, we have to add 137 priests.

## 2. Main contributions of these Brothers to the mission:

- Witnessing of a radical following of Jesus Christ as *Brothers*, understood as a “complete” vocation in itself (*Perfaecta Caritatis, n. 10*), and not related to Priesthood.
- Living in community, by which they enhance the evangelical value of *fraternity*.
- Making a professional contribution through education, health care or other services, but with a clear missionary goal. (In other words, the aim is not only to provide basic higher education, but also to form the students with Christian values to improve the civil society).
- Developing fraternal relationships with the people the Brothers meet or cooperate.
- Living out a leadership service characterised by collegial and fraternal participation.
- Over the last decade efforts have been made to help the poor and marginalized people through a *holistic* education approach.

## 3. Some important challenges these Brothers face:

- The first difficulty is the growing *clericalism* in the Church. Brotherhood is not enough promoted in vocation animation, little known among the faithful, and less appreciated than Priesthood. This “clerical” context renders difficult to get new vocations for Brotherhood.
- The *demographic* decline in many countries (only one or two children by family). This current situation also causes the lack of consecrated/priestly vocations for the Church.
- The emergence of the *laity* through different forms of cooperation with these Congregations also raises the challenge of redefining the “role” or identity of the Brothers in this context.
- To keep the *balance* between spiritual dynamism (consecration) and the professional aspect. (It is important the Brothers have a solid spiritual foundation –giving witnessing of their consecration- and not only restricted to be “good teachers/nurses, technicians”, etc.).
- The progressive *aging* of these Congregations. This factor, combined with the lack or insufficient vocations, raise concerns for the future of these Congregations. In all of them there have been efforts to integrate *laity* into their missionary services.
- A growing *interculturality* of the membership, due to the “shift” of the origin of new vocations. They come now mainly from the “South” of the world (Africa, Asia and Latin America), changing the “face” of these Congregations and some of their structures too.
- The secularized civil society constitutes another challenge due to religious indifference.
- *Pessimistic* behavior (due to the lack of new vocations), requiring a *new vision* for Brothers.

## 4. What have these Congregations been doing to address these challenges?

- Strengthening the identity and spirituality of the Brothers through ongoing formation sessions, seminars, courses and eventual meetings at different levels.
- In one Congregation (FSC), the last general chapter (2007), created a new *Secretary for Brotherhood*, developing adequate initial/ongoing formation programs for the Brothers.
- Creating appropriate structures of collegial consultation at leadership levels in order to facilitate a fraternal and co-responsible decision-making process.
- In view of developing the cooperation with the laity, one Congregation organizes annually a week of studies for its membership and the laity concerned.
- Avoiding consciously the “clericalization” of the Congregation, defending its *Lay* character and by promoting the genuine contribution of Brotherhood to the ecclesial mission.
- Improving vocation promotion and suitable formation programs for Brotherhood.
- Sharing of experiences and reflections on Brotherhood with other Religious Congregations.
- Search for a new vision for the Brotherhood in relation to the new missionary challenges.

## 5. About changing the *juridical* status of the Congregation:

Although this topic was particularly addressed to *Clerical* Congregations, I got also some opinions on the matter from the *Lay* Congregations. To give you a short “background information”, especially for those who are reading this paper for the first time, the issue of changing the juridical status of the Congregations goes back to at least 25 years. In fact, in 1983 the *New Canon Law*, which still is in force, established two types of juridical statuses for the Religious Congregations, namely the so called *Clerical* Congregations/Institutes and those *Lay* Congregations. However, from the beginning, some Congregations, through General Chapter resolutions, tried to change their “clerical” status into a *Clerical-Lay* Congregation, mostly because they had clerics and Brothers. In fact, many religious did not feel “comfortable” with this *clerical* definition of their Congregations.

Also, the Post-Synod document on Consecrated life *Vita Consacrata* (cf. VC n. 60-61, 1996), confirmed the teaching of the Church, already expressed in *Lumen Gentium* (LG) that consecrated life does not belong to the lay nor to the hierarchical structures of the Church, but to its life and holiness (cf. LG n. 44). In spite of these arguments in favour of a possible change of their juridical status, and despite of many requests for it, so far this was not yet granted by the Vatican authorities.

In this connection, some comments from a *Lay* Congregation expressed that *Institutes of Brothers and Brother members of mixed and clerical Institutes we are called to be for the Church and for the world sacraments of Christ the Brother and to give preference to fraternal relationships based on equality, respect, and dialogue* (Bro. Alvaro E. Rodriguez). While this is a reality in *Lay* Congregations, where all members enjoy the same rights and duties, this is not the case in *Clerical* Congregations. In the latter, in spite that all members profess the same religious vows, *Brothers* cannot be major superiors; they only can be local superiors with the rescript of the CICALSAL (Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.). Is this not a counter-witnessing of fraternity? A change from a clerical status to a *clerical-lay* status would fit much better to the essence of religious life: living out a true *fraternity* with common rights and duties, all committed to the same mission.

In general, no one of the *Lay* Congregations has taken any steps to change its juridical status over the last decades. On the contrary, there is a strong feeling of the need to confirm this status, especially in the current ecclesial context in which the Brother vocation is somehow “neglected”. Furthermore, one superior general of these Congregations shared with me that he wrote recently a personal letter to the *Pope, Benedict XVI*, asking him to mention more explicitly the *Brother* vocation in the Church. This request was made in the light of the wide and large “silence” about this vocation when praying for vocations, when doing vocation promotion and in ecclesial events. Another superior also told me that some time ago there was a proposal at the Vatican to publish a document on the Brother vocation, but it seems that this project was “archived” because nobody talks anymore about it... Finally, what is “new” is the recent *Seminar on the Religious Brother* in Lima, Peru (19-21/03/09). It was organized by the CLAR (Religious Conference of Religious for Latin America). Summing up: many Brothers are “longing” for a *word of encouragement* from the Vatican authorities in relation to their vocation...

## 6. Suggestions for the General Assembly on the SVD Brother Vocation:

- To share more information and experiences on *Brotherhood* among the Religious Congregations. This proposal was mentioned many times in my interviews and also in the papers sent to me.
- To keep in high esteem the vocation of the Brother in the SVD since it *is a reminder of the deeper nature of our religious vocation, whatever its function or ministry* (CFX).



- Brothers should be recognized by the entire Institute as “sacraments” of fraternity as the *primary relationship among all the members, and of the radical gospel call to eschew power in favour of service. (CFX).*
- To promote a *positive* description of the Brother’s identity: consecrated person, committed to the Kingdom of God through his community living and professional/technical services, both outside and inside of the Institute to which he belongs to. We should avoid “defining” Brothers in a negative way (e.g. he is *not* a priest; he *cannot* do this or that, etc.).
- Insist on the value of *fraternity* as a common ground for both vocations within the Institute: Priesthood and Brotherhood. Same mission, but through complementary services.
- Get rid of the term “Clerical” Institute since it does not fit well for Religious Congregations.
- Put an end to the distinction, *priests-Brothers*. Search for a common identity...
- Insist on the *prophetic* role of the consecrated life, inspite of its current numerical decreasing. While loyal to the Church’s authority, but at the same time “outside” of its hierarchical structure, Brothers could play the role of the *conscience* of the Church...



## II – Clerical Congregations

Among the variety of *Clerical Congregations*, I focused on those that have similarities with our charism: *Ad Gentes* outreach, commitment to JPIC issues, laity formation, promotion of Christian Communities, Education apostolate, parish ministry, and composed of clerics and Brothers. If in the so called *Lay Congregations*, there have been complaints about “clericalism”; this situation became worse, when listening to some representative members of these Congregations, as well as the answers received by e-mails or additional papers on this matter. The *aging* factor of these Congregations, especially concerning the *Brothers*, originating from Europe is much severe.

As a result, there is a *dearth* of vocations for Brotherhood in almost all of them. For instance, in one Congregation (CS), the Brothers constitute only a 1, 6 % of the total membership (98, 4 % clerics). Of course, other Congregations have a “better” ratio (Brothers-Clerics), ranging from 5 to 12 %. In this context, the SVD is close to the top, with a ratio of 11, 5 % of Brothers. But this may change in a few years time, because of the *aging* factor that is also affecting us, especially in Europe. To have a general overview of the statistics of these Congregations, please see the graphic below.

### 1. Some statistics of these *Clerical Congregations*:

Congregations	Total membership	Clerics		Brothers		Trend of vocations (Brothers)
		Perp. Vows	Temp. Vows	Perp. Vows	Temp Vows	
Compagnia di Gesù (Gesuiti)	18.815 [*]	---	---	1758	---	Decreasing
Missionari Salesiani (SDB)	16.092*	11.385	2.167	1.770	255	Steady (*)
Ordine dei Frati Minori Cappuccini (OFM-Cap)	10.686	7.151	-*-	1.799	1.736	Steady
Missionari Redentoristi (CSSR)	5.385	4.293	609	436	47	Decreasing
Missionari Oblati di Maria (OMI)	4.300	3.201	675	395	29	Decreasing
Missionari Claretiani (CMF)	3.028 *	2.265	488	182	5	Decreasing
Missionari Spiritani (CSSP)	2.876	2.271	442	162	1	Decreasing
Missionari Comboniani (MCCJ)	1.728	1.315	146	250	17	Decreasing
Missionari Saveriani (SX)	807	653	123	31	@	Steady
Missionari Scalabriniani (CS)	706	594	101	11	0	Decreasing
Missionari Verbiti (SVD)	6.131 (+)	4.047	1.047	611	97	Steady

NB: [\*] After profession of religious vows, all members are considered being in perpetual vows.

\* Includes 515 novices.

(\*) The average of newly-professed Brothers over the last decade is 48.

-\*- There is no clear data about *clerics* in temporary vows since they are all considered *Brothers* at this stage. Later on, some of them become priests. (NB: *data of 2007*).

\* Includes 88 novices.

@ The few Brothers in temporary vows are counted with clerical students until final vows.

(+) Including 329 novices, of whom 13 % for Brotherhood (cf. *SVD Catalogus, 2009, p. 463*).

## 2. Main contributions of these Brothers to the mission:

- Historically, many Brothers of these Congregations had an *auxiliary* role in the mission. For instance, they did technical and manual services, mainly to establish and run seminaries, houses, farms, schools, etc.
- Another common trait of Brotherhood in these Congregations is their constant witnessing to consecrated life through prayers, services and long-life commitment as religious. In this regard, the beatification of *Bro. Artemides Zatti*, (sdb, 2002), confirms this way of holiness.
- According to the charism of each Congregation, some Brothers have been committed mainly to education apostolate, youth ministry, health care, pastoral work, JPIC, and formation, etc.
- It is worth to note also that many Brothers are engaged in higher education/universities as teachers. Others still lecture in faculties of Theology, Philosophy or Religious Institutions.
- Quite a number of Brothers carry out a number of jobs in our houses, especially in the field of administration and maintenance. Others are gardeners, secretaries, doorkeepers, etc.
- In spite of the “clerical” status of these Congregations, many Brothers have been appointed local superiors of communities or managers of institutions because of their *leadership* skills.
- Some Brothers also work in the field of *communications*: radio, internet, video production, printing press, journalism, etc.
- A good number of Brothers work also in close *cooperation* with the *laity*, through Catholic associations, pastoral and social groups, NGOs, or inter-cultural faith groups/associations.
- Brothers contribute to community life in a significant way. They are considered to be the *essence* of religious life. Often, they are a source of inspiration and of challenge for the other members of the community.
- For one Congregation (OFM-Cap), the option for a genuine *fraternity* experience is very important. Thus, Brothers, but also clerics, have to strive to live it out as the main “way” of doing mission. Therefore, *Brotherhood* cannot be restricted to its “professional” dimension.
- A few Brothers work with indigenous people and helping in social development programs.

## 3. Some important challenges these Brothers face:

Partly, they are very similar to the ones I have already pointed out for the *Lay* Congregations (cf. pp. 7-8 of this report). Indeed, some of these challenges could be summarized with these words: *clericalism*, *dearth* of vocations, *aging* of the Congregations, *demographic* family crunch, emerging of the *laity*, and *pessimism* regarding the future of Brotherhood due to a lack of suitable *vision* for it.

A particular challenge is the *juridical status* of these Congregations, which does not help outsiders (potential candidates for any of these Congregations) to opt for Brotherhood. Of course, we have to keep in mind that we are dealing with *God’s call* that is addressed to each person in gratuity. However, we must also be aware of the “mediations” by which this grace comes. If, for instance, little is said about Brotherhood; or even if the Congregations are presented as the “.... *Fathers*” how can a young man “discover” this particular vocation to *Brotherhood*? The same negative influence has the number: if 95 % of the Congregation are *Clerics*, it would not be easy to opt for the “minority” group. Furthermore, if the formation program for Brothers are somehow difficult to understand (and even more to implement), getting Brother vocations could be seen as a “miracle”...

Another factor that often ends up “disturbing” Brotherhood is the *identity* crisis of many *Clerics* in relation to their being *religious* (e.g. pastoral activism in detriment of community life, hierarchical relationship over fraternity, selfishness over teamwork, etc.). Also, in the last decades, many Clerics have taken up different jobs that before were done by Brothers, in detriment of their pastoral work. One starts wondering why they asked for *ordination* at all... Or, as one of my confreres once said,

*“I think we are ordaining too many Brothers”... Of course, some would perhaps say that “what a Brother does, a priest can do as well, but not the other way round”. This statement, which I have heard many times, conveys the idea that Priesthood is much more “complete” than Brotherhood...*

If we still add the “advantages” of the clerical status (e.g. becoming “superiors”, bishops, etc.), and the family expectations, Brother candidates have a hard way to go in order to keep their vocation! Also, it is the practise in some *Clerical Congregations*, that the religious in *temporary vows* are called “*brothers*”. As a result, Brotherhood becomes a “transitory” stage, leading to Priesthood. Even if that is not completely true, the faithful get that message, which is confirmed by the question: When will be your *ordination*, Brother? Or, when will you finish your *studies*, Brother?

Another obstacle in almost all the *Clerical Congregations* is the lack or insufficient “*visibility*” of the *Brothers*. Since many of their activities still take place within the Congregations’ structures (house administration, maintenance, gardening, secretariats, etc.), the people have fewer opportunities to get to know this particular vocation. Also, this situation associates Brothers with the idea of playing a *supportive* role (through work and prayer) to the “main” missionaries (priests). I know, this may not be the intention, but unfortunately, this is the “image” of Brothers projected to the laity. In this connection, the role of Brothers being *sacristans* is very illustrative...

In one Congregation (CS), there was a particular challenge: some Brothers would not take up professional studies in order to engage themselves into *migrant* apostolates. Instead, they preferred to assume a “less demanding” training, oriented to parish ministry (catechesis, liturgy, ministers of the Eucharist, readers, etc.). Some of them would also seek admission to the *permanent diaconate*. However, in the opposite side, there is a growing awareness among these Clerical Congregations of the need to start or develop *non-ordained* ministries for Brothers, especially towards *social* fields, JPIC issues, inter-cultural dialogue (e.g. with different migrant ethnic groups), Internet, education. In short, there is a need to better “adapt” the Brother vocation to the current missionary situations.

#### **4. What have these Congregations been doing to address these challenges?**

These Congregations have been undertaking many initiatives over the past years that were similar to those I already mentioned for the Lay Congregations. What is particular here is that these Congregations have two different –although complementary- ways of expressing their charism: the *clerical* and *lay* dimensions of a given charism (e.g. MCCJ, CSSP, CSSR, SDB, etc.). By the fact that these Congregations have a large number of *clerics*, stimulate reflection on the *minority* group seems not an easy task. However, it must be said that due to the *fast numerical declining* of the Brothers, efforts have been made to overcome the related difficulties, namely by:

- Improving *vocation promotion* and suitable *formation programs* for Brotherhood. For instance, the *Combonians* established two common formation centres for their Brothers in temporary vows (Bogotá and Nairobi) to give them a solid spiritual and missiological foundation (lasting 2-3 years), before professional training and mission assignment.
- In some Congregations, a *General Secretary for Brotherhood* or a *Permanent Committee of Brothers* was created to animate this particular vocation –and to raise awareness of it among all the members of their Congregations- through different means.
- Holding *international conventions* on Brotherhood or of Brothers (e.g. in 1970 the Jesuits had their first international Convention of Brothers in Spain and another International Symposium in 1994. Others had similar initiatives: the Salesians held a World Congress of the Salesian Brother in 1975; the SVD had a General Assembly on the Brother Vocation in

1994, and the OMI (Oblates) carried out a worldwide survey among the OMI Brothers, in 1999-2000, leading to the creation of a *Permanent Committee of Brothers*. In all these conventions and ongoing formation sessions, efforts have been made to find a new and suitable *vision* for the Brotherhood in relation to the new missionary challenges. Noticeable is that the Brother vocation *focuses* more on the Kingdom of God and less on the Church's structures. As a result, Brothers cannot "restrict" their presence and action within the Church. They should also *reach out* to the poor, to the migrants, to the youth and to others who might not even be Christians. *With* and not *above* them, Brothers live out their mission.

- Some Congregations also fostered the participation of some Brothers in *leadership* positions (local superiors and also councillors at different levels of decision-making processes). For instance, the Spiritans (CSSP) are revising the participation of Brothers as delegates to the General Chapters, and even to see to possibility of having a Brother in the General Council. In other Congregations (like the Jesuits, OMI, SVD, etc.), the representation of Brothers in General Chapters or/and in General Councils is being practised since many years.
- To some extent, a sharing of experiences and reflections on Brotherhood with other Religious Congregations has been done through documents or eventual meetings. Of, course, much could be done! We all know some Brothers who, in spite of certain difficulties, live out their vocation with joy, dedication, and simplicity. Why not make them more known? Informal sharing of information and experiences via *Internet* or through *e-mail* should be fostered, as well as periodical inter-congregational meetings.
- Some Congregations faced the challenges related to Brotherhood by focusing on the *common vocation* of both expressions of a given charism. For instance, "being" Oblates, Salesians, Jesuits, etc., is the primary "call" (or vocation), then, in second place, comes the *way* of living it out (Priesthood or Brotherhood). This certainly is important, but not enough.
- In fact, in addition to the identification with a *common vocation*, we need also to clarify the *specific* contribution of the Brothers: they are consecrated persons to God, without "clerical" power and serving the people in a fraternal way, inspired by Jesus Christ, the "*firstborn of many brothers*" (*Rm 8, 29*). This is a positive value of religious life. In this connection, one important distinctive contribution of the Brothers for their respective Congregations is that their presence in them "*anchors their Congregations in the Church's religious tradition, which began primarily as a lay movement*" (*cf. Lafarge, SJ*). Or, as Fr. Kolvenbach, SJ, once said, "*In some ways, the religious Brother embodies religious life in its essence*". Another role, resulting from their "being" *laymen*, is their closeness to the workers' world and to be a kind of "bridge" between the laity and the clergy in our Church.
- In some Congregations, efforts have been made to enhance the *liturgical* celebrations related to the profession of *perpetual vows*, as the major sign of our consecration to God. However, due to a long ecclesial practice of celebrating *priestly* ordinations, the faithful (and even the religious) still attach much importance to the latter celebration. Related to the liturgy, some suggestions were made to redress the imbalance of liturgical celebrations, which focus too much on the Eucharist... What about promoting more bible sharing, community prayer services, recollections, and other forms of piety that *Brothers* could also animate?

## **5. About changing the *juridical* status of the Congregation:**

Unlike to what the so called *Lay* Congregations did, which have not requested for a *change* of their juridical status, the *Clerical* Congregations have been doing it over the past decades. As already mentioned on pp. 3-4 of this report, in the process of renewing their Constitutions, after *Vatican II Council (1962-1965)*, many Congregations tried to drop the term “clerical” Congregation/Institute, but with the *New Canon Law*, issue in 1983, they were somehow “classified” as Clerical or Lay Congregations/Institutes. There was no “third way” (*Clerical-Lay* Congregations/Institutes) left!

In this context, I would to quote an excerpt of “*A Theological Reflection on the Place of the Brothers in the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*” by Normand Provencher, OMI, p. 10, 2003. He wrote: **the canonical legislation wants to point out that in a clerical Institute “the sacred ministry is constitutive of the charism and determines its nature, purpose and spirit.” This juridical expression means that our Institute does not have as its first end works like education and teaching, social work or health care. “Lay” religious Institutes can have these works as a principal end. Without excluding these, a clerical Institute has as its purpose to offer the ministry of the word and the sacramental ministry, which are necessary to accomplish the mission of the Church. These ministries require ordination. In a “clerical” Institute, government is confided in principle to those that assure the primary purpose of the Institute and on all government levels: local, provincial and general. So it is that a clerical Institute is governed by clerics and they are recognized as such by the authority of the Church (cf. The Code of Canon Law, 588, 2).**

The above quotation seems very clear, but (there is always a “but” somewhere!), it does not resolve the *fraternity* dimension of a given Clerical Congregation. For instance, in the *Convegno 1996 of the OFM-Cap, Relazioni di studio*, p. 643, we can find the following reflection that was made by the then General Minister, J. Corriveau, “I believe it is true to add, that since brotherhood is constitutive of the charism of a mixed institute, all members –priests and those who are not priests – not only *can* be equal, rather, they *must* be equal. Without equality, no true brotherhood exists. The denial of equality is the denial of a constitutive element of the charism itself. However, it is of far greater importance that the Holy Father assigns *brotherhood* a constitutive role in mixed institutes.” (This reflection was made in the light of the Post Synod document *Vita Consacrata*, nn. 60-61, which was issued in 1996).

As it is now, the “dream” of a true fraternity in mixed institutes remains a “dream” because all the attempts done so far by the Clerical Congregations to change their juridical status failed. This situation obviously has entailed that many requests made to allow *Brothers* to be major superiors in these Congregations was also denied by the Vatican authorities. Even the request made by the Jesuits in 1974 to allow their Brothers to profess the 4<sup>th</sup> vow was not granted. This *internal inequality* among the members of a given Clerical Congregation may be a strong reason why new vocations to Brotherhood are declining so fast over the past years... One wonders if the Vatican authorities are aware of the grave damage that is being caused to the Church in this regard...

## **6. Suggestions for the General Assembly on the SVD Brother Vocation:**

- One of the suggestions that surfaced many times in our interviews and in the papers that were sent to me, was the desire to *share* more often our reflections, surveys, and outcomes of our congresses/meetings, among the religious Congregations. For that purpose, internet, e-mail facilities as well as eventual inter-Congregational meetings could be explored.
- Other proposals went in the direction of encouraging the General Assembly on the SVD Brother Vocation to focus on some important fields of current missionary situations: JPIC, secularized world, youth apostolate, migrants, and health care, etc.

- Review the “image” of Brotherhood we project to the people. Thus, it makes sense to improve vocation promotion and religious-missionary witnessing. In this regard, insist on a good screening of candidates for Brotherhood and setting up suitable formation programs.
- Not to lose “sight” of the necessary “balance” between religious consecration and professional work. This is to avoid having “good professionals”, but without a proper spirituality. But the opposite is also true: it is not enough having “good religious” without suitable professional/technical training to face the contemporary missionary challenges.
- To avoid the formation of two “rival” groups: priests and Brothers.
- Taking into account that holding world congresses or general assemblies is not easy to organize at a regular basis, it is advisable to promote more inter-provincial/regional or zonal meetings on Brotherhood.



### III – Summary of the major insights of this survey:

#### a. Personal reflection

Looking back, at the different interviews I had during this survey and also at the responses I received through e-mail, I was impressed by the “positive welcome” of this initiative. Indeed, many representatives of the Congregations I met expressed their gratitude for gathering information on Brotherhood and wished to have a copy of its outcome. I felt there is a general concern about the Brother vocation and a search for possible “solutions” to their rapid numerical *decline*, mainly in the Clerical Congregations (cf. statistics on pp. 6 and 10 of this report).

But, I had also the opportunity to make interesting exchanges of information about SVD Brotherhood and getting to know some of the “joys and sorrows” of the Brothers in the Congregations I was surveying. In fact, I was happy to receive many useful articles and booklets about the Brother vocation in these Congregations (e.g. OFM-Cap, OMI, SDB, FSC, SJ, etc.). These papers helped me to realize the different “struggles” that have been taking place over the past decades to update the *identity* and *mission* of the Brother vocation in the contemporary civil society and in fidelity to the charism of each Religious Congregation. One gets the impression that a lot of energy was put in these processes of reflection and sharing of experiences. Although the practical “benefit” of these efforts was not always “evident”, we can feel the love for Christ that was expressed in this search for a creative fidelity in following Him as *religious*.

Another reflection that “touched” me in a particular way was the insistence on living out a true *brotherhood* as the main way of doing mission (OFM-Cap) or, as Bro. Alvaro E. Rodriguez (SFC) would say, “Our being *Brothers* is our treasure”...; “I like to think of a Brother as a “*sacrament of the horizontal dimension*” that prevents us, as the Gospel says, from calling persons father or teacher and invites us to call one another and to live like Brothers (cf. Matthew 23: 8-9)”. I guess that this *fraternal* approach to community life and mission is great!


Therefore, I believe that from the above reflections, a more positive *vision* of Brotherhood can emerge. In fact, another aspect that caught my attention is related to it: there seems to be a process going on –perhaps no so much “noticed” because younger Brothers are not so numerous-, leading to a “new role model” of Brotherhood... it is like the *metamorphosis* of the caterpillar into a butterfly. By this I will say that Brotherhood is in a “transition period”, which at the moment is not easy, but that can result in a better future with new generations of Brothers.

#### b. Some Proposals

The numerical decline of Brother vocations has many causes (demographic, social, and ecclesial, which were already mentioned in pp. 6-7 of this report). However, there is something that we (Religious-Missionary Congregations) can do to improve this situation: praying, making better vocation promotion efforts, living out a genuine fraternity in our relationships and works, as well as a creative commitment to the new missionary situations of our world. As I already stated before, the Brotherhood is expecting a “word of encouragement” from the Pope, perhaps through some concrete initiatives: public speech in favour of this particular vocation, entrusting the CICLSAL the publication of a document on Brotherhood, (after consulting the USG –*Unione Superiori Generali*) and finally, to revise the current *Canon Law*, in relation to the juridical “definitions” of Religious Congregations. With these thoughts and proposals, I conclude my report, thanking everyone for the attention to read it. May the Lord bless you all!



## IV – Appendix

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4th August 2008  
P 05/2008

**To all Provincial and Regional Superiors of the Society**

**In re: General Assembly on the Brother Vocation (Details and Preparation Process)**

Dear Fr. Provincial/Regional,

After preparatory consultations on the implementation of the XVI General Chapter's recommendation 3.5, I now announce that the General Assembly on the Brother Vocation will be hosted by the Philippine Southern Province (PHS) and will be held **on 29 June–12 July 2009** at the **Talavera Retreat House in Cebu City, Philippines**.

On the basis of the preliminary survey of opinions, the following has been chosen as the main theme of the assembly: **The SVD Brother Vocation and Prophetic Dialogue**. The general assembly is then envisioned to respond to the Spirit's call for renewal of the SVD Brother's vocation and mission in the light of the last two General Chapters, and in the context of our changing mission situations "here and now".

At the recent meeting of the generalate with the zonal coordinators, the delegates to the assembly have been chosen from the roster of names proposed by provincials and regionals through the zonal coordinators. *Please consult the enclosed official list*. Because we want the assembly to be the corporate voice of our SVD Brothers responding to their call for missionary renewal in today's world, you will justly note that two-thirds of the appointed delegates are Brothers.

The immediate task that I then entrust to you is **to appoint an ad hoc committee** consisting of three to five members, and of Brothers and clerics, as far as possible. The second attachment (***Communal Reflection Guide***) outlines the reflection process that this committee is expected to animate within your province/region.

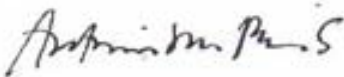
The zonal coordinators have been already instructed to form ad hoc zonal committees in February 2009 to collate the results of the reflection from the provinces and regions.

*By 31 January 2009, therefore, please make sure that your preparatory committee for the general assembly will have sent to your respective zonal coordinator its **written synthesis** of the reflections and proposals of the confreres in your province or region.*

The final working paper (to be prepared by a committee at the Generalate) for the General Assembly on the Brother Vocation, will be based on the four zonal syntheses.

Thank you in advance for your collaboration!

One with you in the Divine Word,



Antonio M. Pernia, SVD  
Superior General



Emmanuel K. Fianu, SVD  
Secretary General

**General Assembly on the Brother Vocation**  
**29 June – 12 July 2009**  
**Cebu City, Philippines**

**Final List of the participants (Updated in February 2009)**

**AFRAM:**

- Brothers: - Facatino, João (ANG)  
- Acquaah, McDaniel (GHA)  
- Kakanou, Theodore (TOG)  
- Mazola, Guy (CNG)
- Priests: - Sanchez, Xene (Zonal Coordinator)  
- Quadros, Sebastian (MAD)

**ASPAC:**

- Brothers: - Bilung, Emmanuel (INC)                      - Ekka, Julius (ING)  
- Too, Yakobus (AUS)                                      - Le, Quang Van Joseph, (VIE)  
- Guna, H. Stanislaus (IDR)                              - Abulad, Romualdo (PHS)  
- Mamaq, M. Martinus (IDE)                              - Soreng, Rajesh (INH)  
- Kullu, Rajes (PNG)                                        - Leeb, Leopoldo (SIN)
- Priests: - Burt, William (Zonal Coordinator)  
- Kleden, Leo (IDE)

**EUROPE:**

- Brothers: - Ertl, Michael (GER)                                - Aichhorn, Franz (OES)  
- Szewczuk, Piotr (POL)                                   - Butala, Maros (SLO)
- Priests: - Fencz, Anton (Zonal Coordinator)  
- A., Joseph Xavier (GER)

**PANAM:**

- Brothers: - Rudnick, Moacir (BRC)                              - Decker, Michael (USC)  
- Duarte, Roberto (ECU)                                   - Heisterhoff, Uwe (BOL)  
- Benítez, Néstor (ARS)                                   - Spitzley, Bernie (USC)  
- Mayulu, Raoul (PAR)
- Priests: - Riebe-Estrella, Gary (Zonal Coordinator)  
- Espinosa, Nicolas (COL)

**GENERALATE:**

- Fr. Pernia, Antonio (Superior General)  
Br. Berger, Alfonso (General Councilor)  
Fr. Estepa, Pio (Mission Secretary)  
Fr. Malipurathu, Thomas (Secretary for Formation and Education)

# COMMUNAL REFLECTION GUIDE

*General Assembly on the Brother Vocation  
Cebu City, Philippines  
29 June - 12 July 2009*

## Instructions for the Committee on the Provincial/Regional level

### 1. Personal Preparatory Study.

Your first task as members of the committee is to familiarize yourselves with the documents:

- *Analecta SVD 70/1* (report on the 1994 General Assembly on the Brother Vocation), especially pp. 86-96 and pp. 97-98;
- *You Are All Brothers*, (booklet published by the Generalate in 2005).

Electronic copies of these documents can be found on our Website: [www.svdcuria.org](http://www.svdcuria.org) under Formation ([SVD Brother Formation](#)).

It will be of further help to review the statements of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> SVD General Chapters from the viewpoint of the general assembly's theme. Worth special noting are those sections that make explicit mention of the SVD Brothers, for instance:

- IDW 1, nos. 104, n. 33, 61, 102;
- IDW 6, nos. 44, 87, 90, 94, 99;
- *Resolutions* 1.2 and 2.3 of the 16<sup>th</sup> General Chapter on the SVD Brothers.

### 2. Looking Back Together.

Your second task as a committee is an evaluative review of the recommendations of the 14th General Chapter (see *Analecta, 70/1*, pp. 97-98, and *Following the Word 5*, page 22):

1. That the provincial programs of brother formation be re-evaluated every three years according to the demands of the constitutions, the past general chapter and the needs of the times, in order to secure their full implementation.
2. That provinces see to it that an adequate number of brother formators be prepared to be involved in the various phases of SVD priesthood and brotherhood formation and to take their place on SVD formation boards.
3. That all superiors, while accepting the principle of unity in diversity, confront any existing situations, structures or mentalities which cause or perpetuate unacceptable divisions or inequalities among members within the Society.
4. That all provinces continue to seek clearer understanding of the vocation of the religious missionary brother and take positive steps to conscientize the public about this vocation and, at the same time, actively foster brother vocations in the Church of today.
5. That provinces, while recognizing the value of the traditional work and services of the brothers, also train brothers in new areas of mission specialization required by the needs of our times and provide programs to develop leadership skills.

6. That when new mission areas are being studied for acceptance, the province/generalate should consider, wherever possible, assigning teams of brothers and priests to work together in them.

**Which of these recommendations have been implemented in your province/region – how and to what extent?**

### **3. Animating Communal Reflection.**

The third task of the committee is to animate confreres in the province/region to reflect on these three main questions:

- Why are vocations to the lay brotherhood alarmingly declining in our Society today?
- What can or should be done to promote anew vocations for the SVD brotherhood?
- What further concerns must the upcoming General Assembly on the Brother Vocation address or consider?

### **4. Summing Up in Writing.**

The last task for the committee consists in collating and summing up the results of the confreres' communal reflections in writing, keeping with the following framework:

4.1. **Reflecting** on the theme and main concerns proposed for the forthcoming assembly. In doing so, it is recommended to pay attention to the

- (a) secular,
- (b) ecclesial,
- (c) congregational

factors that have caused the dwindling of vocations for the SVD brotherhood over the last years.

4.2. **Looking forward**, searching for ways to overcome the related difficulties (dwindling of Brother vocations) by taking a closer look at the:

- (a) spiritual,
- (b) formational,
- (c) structural,
- (d) missionary,

aspects of our life in the light of *Prophetic Dialogue*.

4.3. **Making further comments/suggestions** for the up coming assembly on the Brother vocation. Here the confreres of your province/region may add their comments or suggestions that could not be included above.

Kindly submit your written synthesis to your respective Zonal Coordinator **before 31 January 2009**.