

PHILIPPINES - NORTHERN PROVINCE

Official Language: **English**

Vision Statement

Living the spirituality of Arnold Janssen, we envision a community in dialogue with the Word, the world and with one another.

Mission Statement

We, the Divine Word Missionaries of the Philippine Northern Province envision an intercultural community in prophetic dialogue. We engage in constant and respectful dialogue with the poor and marginalized, indigenous peoples, faith seekers, those who have secular ideologies, youth and migrants by building faith communities through four characteristic dimensions: JPIC, biblical apostolate, mission animation and communications.

1. Societal Setting

The Philippines Northern Province has three political regions with fourteen provinces and nine cities. Regions 1 and 2 are mostly populated by lowlanders who live along the plains and coastal areas (Ilokanos, Pangasinan, etc). The Indigenous Peoples, ethnic and tribal groups, live in Cagayan and Cordillera regions. Eight rivers flow from the Cordillera ranges down to the foothills of the valleys. The lowlanders live by farming, agriculture and fishing. They



cultivate big tracts of rice-lands, cornfields and cassava root-crops. The uplanders carved the hills and mountains into terraces of rice and vegetable gardens thus creating the 8th wonder of the world – the Banawe Rice Terraces. They augment their income by raising livestock, small mining traditions, and indigenous forest management. The lowlanders adopted the ways of the colonizers, thus they converted to Christianity (1521). They aided the Spanish friars in doing mission among the indigenous peoples. Many natives resisted the new faith and remained faithful to their traditional religiosity. The political disturbances during Martial Law (1971-86) damaged the democratic system in the nation.

Political dynasties ruled the country. The ISIS (Islamic State of Iran & Syria) factor creates anxiety and instability. Prophetic dialogue expressed in the four Characteristic Dimensions is an approach that will aid in putting things in its proper context. From this perspective there is optimism for a better (Northern) Philippines.

2. Ecclesial Setting

From the 1960's to the 80's, converts to Catholicism increased from locally founded religions like the *Iglesia Independiente de las Islas Filipinas* (Aglipayans). In the 90's the youth switched their alliances between popular Charismatic movements and Pentecostal missions. In 2014, the *Iglesia in Cristo* (Felix Manalo) strengthened their proselytizing evangelism without room for any ecumenical collaboration. They deny the divinity of Christ. At present, among the 10 dioceses in this region, there are 530 priests (21 foreigners), 596 sisters (31 foreigners) and 6 brothers (2 foreigners).

When St. Arnold Janssen found out that there were people without 'faith' in Cagutungan (Abra), he finally decided to send the first SVDs to the Philippines in 1909. These are the Tinggians of Abra. The passion of our founder is that "the darkness of sin and the night of unbelief vanish before the light of the Word and the Spirit of grace". This passion for the light of the Word to banish the night of heathenism is passed on to SVDs, particularly in ministry with the indigenous peoples. This is a peculiar feature of SVD mission presence in the three

regions of Northern Luzon (regions 1 and 2) and the Cordillera. Of the 9 dioceses where the SVDs are working, 8 dioceses have indigenous peoples. The PHN province's biblical apostolate works closely in inter-confessional translation of the Bible with the Philippine Bible Society (PBS). The Episcopal Commission for the Biblical Apostolate (ECBA) of CBCP forged an agreement after PBS for an inter-confessional network right after Vatican II. ECBA and PBS work hand in hand in Bible translation, production and distribution, as well as annual activities for the common celebration of the national Bible Week.

Our College Seminary formation stopped temporarily due to adjustments to the new program of the Department of Education. PHN is tapping the help of lay mission partners from the families of Divine Word Missionaries, from SVD Friends and members of the XVD (former members of the SVD) for responding to vocations. The local Churches are making a lot of efforts in finding means to be viable through the pledges - commitments to offer in kind or in cash in the Basic Ecclesial Communities. Volunteerism in doing pastoral and catechetical services is very helpful.

Our province needs to highlight the centrality of the Word of God in every BEC and facilitate the movement of the Holy Spirit for renewal and transformation (Biblical Apostolate). The *Ad gentes* mission approach is deepened by the *inter gentes* process of working with peoples, among peoples in different situations and realities.

3. SVD Intercultural Mission – *Ad Extra*

Those in Final Vows

IN ACTIVE MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Parish	33	38.0	30.7	39.5
Education	20	23.0	23.5	18.0
Schools	17	-		
Universities	3	-		
Formation/ SVD Vocation	1	1.1	3.9	5.2
Administration/ Support	2	2.2	11.0	11.6
Other Apostolates	10	11.4	14.7	9.9
JPIC	1	-		
Bible	1	-		
Communication	1	-		
Mission Animation	1	-		
Others	6	-		

Those in Final Vows

NOT IN MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Studies/ Orientation	1	1.1	1.9	1.2
Retired/Sick	8	9.2	3.9	4.1
Others	12	14.0	10.4	10.5

After a series of orientation seminars for all the districts about prophetic dialogue through the four Characteristic Dimensions, each dimension was given a pilot area. Mission animation to the Parish of San Isidro, “cradle of the SVD”; biblical apostolate to Sta. Praxedes, Cagayan; justice, peace and integrity of creation to St. Joseph in Mudeng, La Paz, Abra; and communications to Divine Word College, Laoag. Confreres who were assigned to implement the dimension in their parish / school did not have the initiative to create their programs. They were supposed to contextualize the four characteristic dimensions in their own context. There was no implementation.

Priorities among the Congregational Directions

In light of the PHN Action Plan, the selected priorities among the Congregational Directions *ad extra* are the following: New evangelization and education, family and life and the indigenous peoples.

New Evangelization: This is a priority in pastoral work done with new methods and expressions that are rooted in peoples’ faith-life experiences. These efforts are intensified by an attitude of doing prophetic dialogue with partners in mission through the four Characteristic Dimensions. The new mission areas are Adams in Ilocos Norte, Quirino and Cervantes in Ilocos Sur at the foot of the Cordilleras, and Tanudan in Kalinga. The education apostolate carries the “Tatak SVD” (*SVDmark* – *SVDness*) parti-

cularly among the young and the whole school community. This *tatak* translates the four core values. I-S-E-E to all on campus, namely: Integrity (I), Social Responsibility (S), Excellence (E), and Evangelization (E). JPIC is integrated in the school's community outreach programs for the poor and needy communities. Political interventions by political dynasties during crisis periods are challenging and difficult. Proactive programs for social concerns like ongoing formation are helpful. Youth formation for justice, peace, integrity of creation, and for living prophetic dialogue is given importance.

Family and Life: The province adheres to the traditional family values of the protection of life from conception to natural death. We uphold the teachings of the Church and respect cultural family traditions of respect for the elderly, youth and children. It is family reverence of life from the “womb to the tomb” from “conception to resurrection”. We are committed to the call of VIVAT Philippines for the protection of life. A way of strengthening family and life is continuing the ongoing gathering of family members of SVD confreres into a reunion through meaningful recollections along with the SVD friends. Confreres are encouraged to urge their family members to visit each other and to join groups that adhere to family and life, like the Couples for Christ, the Circles for Christ, and many more family and life oriented groups.

Indigenous Peoples: Indigenous peoples abound in the Philippine Northern province.

Our province administers 9 parishes, 7 of which belong to the indigenous peoples. These groups have their own ethnolinguistic origins complete with their own distinct languages, customs, rituals and world views. The natives retained their indigeneity despite the influence of the Spaniards from 1521-1878. The first love of our founder St. Arnold Janssen is for the indigenous peoples of the Cordillera, the Tinggians in Cagutungan (San Isidro), Abra. The province needs to appreciate the efforts of veteran missionaries among indigenous peoples by rereading their journals and stories. The museums (DWCB, DWCL) are used as aids to the understanding of interculturality and *inter-gentes*. Anyone who would enter the DWCB museum would be able to grow into appreciation of one's roots and cultural heritage. Thus, it is a challenge to review the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) law and relevant laws, to read and write our stories (*From Mission to Missionary Church* by Fr. Mike Layugan, SVD) to allow the Word of God to give life to our priorities. A compendium of research and documentation together with the schools and formation centers in coordination with Divine Word Institute for Missionological Studies (DWIMS) would enhance this PHN priority on indigenous peoples and facilitate a joyful process of inculturation.

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Collaboration with the SSpS and others

The Baguio district has an annual gathering with the Arnoldus Family (SVD, SSpS, SSpSAP) on the occasion of the feasts of either St. Arnold Jansen or St. Joseph Freinademetz. It falls in the month of January (Bible Month) right after the prayer for Church Unity Octave. The Arnoldus Family celebrates the occasion with some meaningful programs. Our coming together is a moment of greeting and thanking each other for mutual moral and spiritual support in the mission. It is also a way of promoting awareness in the community of the unique mission contribution of the members of the Arnoldus Family. We also join common vocation promotion efforts together with other religious congregations. In almost all dioceses, we are members of the Association of Religious Women and Men. We help each other in feeding programs of poor children and nursing mothers in the Christmas season and assist as much as possible during typhoons and disasters.

SVD Lay Partners

The lay partners are known as SVD Friends Abra Chapter, SVD Friends Baguio Chapter, SVD Friends Dagupan Chapter, SVD Friends Urdaneta Chapter, and the Breakfast Club of San Fernando, La Union. They do different kinds of services for the mission and for SVD missionaries: praying for missionaries and offering financial donations during the SVD mission month in September for medical care and maintenance of the missionaries. SVD lay partners organize medical mission outreaches with a team of me-

dical personnel for free medical services, surgeries and medications. The SVD Friends Abra Chapter organizes a Mission Festival and pilgrimages in the month of September, mission awareness talks, worship songs and healing sessions in coordination with their spiritual director. The active ones number about 70. When all become active, they would be more than three hundred.

The new groups of lay partners are the XVDs and LSJA (Lay Society of St Arnold). The XVDs are former SVD seminarians, priests and brothers who want to serve either financially or spiritually. The XVDs have other subgroups according to their batch / class (Manus Dei). The incumbent President of the XVD, Mr. Pochiolo Morillo, gathered the officers together in Baguio in February, 2017 in order to realign their programs to the vision/mission/goals of the SVD PHN-PHC. PHN has officially recognized the SVDF and XVD lay partners groups.

4. Intercultural Life – *Ad Intra*

MEMBERSHIP	2018	2012	2005
Bishop	1	1	2
Clerics	79	76	77
Brothers (final vows)	6	4	7
Scholastics	0	0	2
Total	86	81	88

AGE AND COUNTRY	2018	2012	2005
Average age	53.4	52.7	51.1
Nationalities	8	6	8

Spirituality: San Isidro, Abra is a “parish in perpetuity” being the cradle of the SVD in the Philippines. Confreres are building it up as a center of mission in the light of the Arnold Janssen Spirituality and the four Characteristic Dimensions. The retreat center in Baguio District promotes community prayers among confreres with an annual gathering of prayer and formation of the Arnoldus Family (SSpSAP and SSpS) in a Kapatiran (fellowship). Making the celebration of the sacraments in a more inculturated way is a challenge among confreres. Deepening research and study on the living cultures of peoples both in the lowlands and among indigenous peoples is a must. Confreres in the field need updates at the DWIMS. They can also share their experiences there or request DWIMS to travel to PHN.

Community: The eight nationalities in PHN add to good dynamics in our communities. It is a positive contribution to the local churches where we work. There are more things in common which are experienced in community: bonding, sharing, meetings, recollections, retreats, picnics, excursions and visits. We celebrate differences and diversities to refresh relationships. Learning to recognize cultural richness in the dynamics of cross-cultural communication is an art. The quarterly meetings of district superiors together with the coordinators of ministries, with participation of the provincial leadership team, provide more openness and deeper appreciation of confreres among themselves and their lay partners. Despite the demands of varied apostolates, our desire to participate in community functions,

meals, prayers, community meetings, celebrations and recollections, is a priority.

Leadership: The confreres in servant-leadership “lead the members in dialogue as servant-leaders who are compassionate, pro-active and selfless. They lead by good example and promote participation by empowering others. The communication from the provincial superior must be done regularly and systematically.” The leadership needs to oversee the four Characteristic Dimensions together with the respective coordinators of the same. People in authority are respected more in their ability to lead confreres into meaningful dialogue among themselves, then into prophetic dialogue, as confreres exemplifying dialogue and as prophets.

Finance: The province has employed a creative and responsible approach in managing our financial resources and assets: revival of the Finance Committee with experts; creation of a manual of financial transactions and recording; financial transparency; and a Board of Trustees in School Apostolates directing the President(s) to study the salary scale of their constituents. An essential part of good financial management is the practice of responsibility and accountability in all the ministries in the parish, schools and in institutions. Good maintenance of buildings (schools, retreat and youth centers) and churches (chapels) provide a healthy space to practice transparency, administration and generation of material and financial resources. Engagement in income generating projects in the communities is to be encouraged. This attitude of simplicity in our fide-

lity to live the vow of poverty, and being faithful stewards who are moving more and more towards self-reliance and simple lifestyle, are significant elements toward financial stability.

Formation: The individual and community witness of confreres contributes a lot to a favorable ambiance for the initial formation and for the ongoing formation of members. The DWIMS is challenging us to engage ongoing formation in our life in mission. Confreres in formation may have an immersion in pastoral realities in the mission field before being assigned to formation houses. The quarterly meetings are opportunities for common reflections on the Characteristic Dimensions and Arnold Janssen spirituality. It is also a space for ongoing formation—professionalization in inculturation in process. As the programs become more acceptable and understandable, we could own it and move forward accordingly in the districts in collaboration with the local church.

Efforts are being made in initial formation and ongoing formation for spiritual renewal. The initial formation and ongoing formation of confreres should focus on fluency in the local languages “to bring them closer to the heart and home of the people”. Mastery of the local languages gives a deeper understanding of cultural values and challenges. Speaking the mother tongue facilitates efforts at inculturation of the sacraments, education and pastoral programs. Inculturation processes lead us to the “depth, height and width” of cultural heritage. It aids us to proactive approaches to challenge the culture of corruption and violence toward a more profound sensing of the silence and the tranquility of peace already present in the peoples’ lives. Every confrere should know the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA). It will deepen pastoral and theological reflections as we join efforts with the missiological institute at DWIMS, Tagaytay.