

## ITALY PROVINCE

### Italy, Romania, Moldova and Albania

Official language: **Italian**

#### Vision Statement

*We strive to be faithful hearers of the word of God as a gift of the spirit; we form communities that are sustained with fraternal care and are open to be hospitable with others.*

#### Mission Statement

*As spiritual sons of Sts. Arnold Janssen and Joseph Freinademetz, we missionaries of the Divine Word province of Italy give witness to the universality of God's loving Kingdom. Wherever we may work we want to promote:*

- *Mission awareness, and a reaching out to people who follow other religious traditions or who are not Christian;*
- *Justice, peace and integrity of creation, with special attention to the poor, the marginalized, and the elderly;*
- *Veneration of St. Joseph Freinademetz.*

#### 1. Social Setting

The northern part of Italy is the most rich and industrialized region of the Italian peninsula (Milan, Turin and Venice). Agriculture and tourism (especially in the area of the Alps) are of great importance, as well as trade and industry. According to the Santander Trade Portal, the Italian economy



has been very much affected by the world financial crisis – since 2007, it has shrunk by 9% and has undergone 13 quarters of recession. In 2016, despite the adopted reforms, the Italian economy was still very vulnerable to unforeseen changes.

The Santander Trade Portal also notes that, in 2016, the country suffered two earthquakes and a humanitarian crisis caused by the arrival of 170,000 immigrants. The rate of unemployment, on the rise since the beginning of the global crisis, stands at 11.5% and hardly has been reduced by the increase of an active population. The most affected are young people, with a rate of close to 35% unemployed. Regional disparities remain between the very large rural and poor areas of the South and the North which is dynamic and very industrialized. Organized crime is another problem that persists.

## 2. Ecclesial Setting

**Italy:** Despite the small number of people who attend churches (15% to 18% of the population attends Sunday Mass), the Catholic Church is still exerting a strong and influential presence in Italian society. As in other parts of the world, the number of vocations to the priesthood and religious life has decreased.

In the context of the local church, the lack of priestly vocations in the Church has led all dioceses to regroup in pastoral areas where the priest has the task of managing more than one parish.

### Province's commitment and solidarity with the most needy

This has also affected the religious communities that have had to reassess their pastoral style of being present and serving in the diocese. The arrival of thousands of refugees has led religious congregations to reflect on their presence in this social phenomenon: we are called to receive and serve the mission that comes to us.

**Romania:** It is a predominantly Christian Orthodox country. In Romania, religion and socio-political life are interrelated. The concept of Church is defined in a very hierarchical sense, and has a nationalistic tone. The Catholic Church, reorganized and revitalized after the revolution of 1989, has gradually grown in importance through the reconstruction of its churches. However, the Church maintains a rather clerical mentality, and the laity tend to engage little. Pastoral work is concentrated in the

celebration of the liturgy and the administration of the sacraments. Ecumenism, although considered essential for all Churches, advances slowly due to little opening for dialogue by the bishops.

**Moldova:** In this country, although the majority of the population professes to be Christian Orthodox, few Moldavians show interest in religion - perhaps a result of the many years of atheistic communism. At the same time, the Orthodox Church does not grant much importance to family life or participation in society - nor in the social dimensions of the works of charity. Participation in the life of the Church is rather irregular, and the formation in the faith, or catechesis, practically does not exist. Being a small minority, the Catholic Church resumed its activities of first evangelization from 1991. There is a single Catholic diocese in Moldova made up of 17 parishes, and attended by around 28 priests. There are currently some 14 congregations with members in Moldova.

**Albania:** Christianity in Albania is very old, dating from the first kerygma of the Apostles. Today Catholics who reside in Albania number nearly half a million. They are distributed in two archdioceses, to which is added the Apostolic Administration of southern Albania which gathers the faithful of the Byzantine rite, those who belong to the Greco-Catholic Albanian Church, and the faithful of the Latin rite. The other half of the three million two hundred thousand inhabitants are Muslims. Recent history shows that the Catholic Church, 18 years after obtaining religious freedom - from 1990 until today - suffered a period of persecution and martyrdom for 55 years.

### 3. Intercultural life - *Ad Extra*

The Italian province was established in 1965, separating it from the province of Switzerland. Currently it is comprised of 4 countries: Italy, Romania, Moldova and Albania with 5 main languages: Italian, German, Romanian, Russian and Albanian. There are five SVD communities in northern Italy: Vicenza, Bolzano, Oies, and Varone. In Rome the catacombs of Priscilla belong to the Italian province. Divine Word College in Rome and the *Ad Gentes Center* in Nemi are under the administration of the SVD Generalate.

#### Those in Final Vows

IN ACTIVE MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
<b>Parish</b>	9	23.1	30.8	33.3
<b>Education</b>	1	2.6	0	0
Schools	1	-		
Universities	0	-		
<b>Formation/ SVD Vocation</b>	2	5.1	10.3	2.8
<b>Administration/ Support</b>	3	7.7	22.2	23.6
<b>Other Apostolates</b>	14	35.9	13.7	16.7
JPIC	4	-		
Bible	1	-		
Communication	1	-		
Mission Animation	4	-		
Others	4	-		

#### Those in Final Vows

NOT IN MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Studies/ Orientation	3	7.7	2.7	5.6
Retired/Sick	7	17.9	20.3	18.1
Others	0	0	0	0

#### Main apostolates

At Varone and Bolzano in Italy, the main apostolates are to manage the different parishes as a team, where we have to intensify our presence as witnesses to mission, and give encouragement in all areas.

In Vicenza, Italy, we do pastoral services in collaboration with the diocese: one confrere coordinating pastoral ministry with migrants from the Philippines in Vicenza, another confrere collaborating in prison ministry, and a third working with charity groups on the parish level. At the parish they give spiritual accompaniment to migrants from Latin America as well as receiving and helping in the integration of refugees who are accepted in the region of Veneto.

At the birthplace of St. Joseph Freinademetz in Oies, we help strengthen and renew devotion to our first missionary.

In Romania the main objective is to help the Romanian Church be open to missionary work. Our presence is today confined to a local Church,

where the number of diocesan priests is very high. The formation house in Cordum has been converted to a center for the Bible apostolate.

In Moldova we work in parishes where there are, as in Chişinău, Orhei, and Staucen, very poor areas and where many children are orphaned. We have built and manage a nursery and a soup kitchen where 100 meals a day are distributed. There is also a refugee refuge house.

In Albania we have taken on the parish of Santa Maria in Valore (Valona). The confreres will live in the house attached to the Church and also provide the pastoral administration of two sub-stations: Orikum which is 25 km from Valona, and Babiza which is 15 minutes by car.

We have taken on the administration of the catacombs of Priscilla. We have an SVD community there which aims to manage the flow of tourist visits and also do pastoral work on weekdays and Sundays in the parish.

### Characteristic Dimensions

**Mission Animation:** In Varone, there is an active Association of the SVD friends, a group of alumni from the mission house, whose aim is mainly promoting human and spiritual growth, and missionary commitment of its members and at the same time promote fraternity and collaboration among its members.

**Biblical Apostolate:** The formation house in Cordum has become a Biblical-Pastoral Center.

Two confreres are in the community that serves the Biblical Pastoral Center. It has started to publish a Sunday leaflet for families. The response so far has been very positive. A confrere is responsible for the follow up of the groups that have been formed in several parishes helping people to know the word of God and praying in community.

**JPIC:** The apostolate among migrants and prisoners in Vicenza, soup kitchens for children and the elderly, and social assistance for those in Chişinău, Orhei, and Staucen in Moldova are examples of the province's commitment and solidarity with the most needy.

### Priorities among Congregational Directions

**Primary evangelization and new evangelization:** We have accepted the challenge of opening the SVD presence in Albania (primary evangelization) and intensifying our presence in Moldova (primary evangelization).

**Ecumenical and interreligious dialogue:** These activities are carried out in our province in the following places: in Varone with the promotion of the Center of Dialogue; in Moldova and Romania with the promotion of dialogue between Catholics and Orthodox; in Albania with the dialogue among Catholics, Muslims and Orthodox.

**Family and youth:** We give priority in our pastoral service to families and young people (Varone - Oies - Bolzano - Romania - Moldova and Albania).

**Migration:** It has been our commitment to renew the SVD presence by founding an international community in Vicenza which is at the service of immigrants and the new poverty: prison ministry and refugees.

### Collaboration with the Local Church

In the community of Vicenza there are currently three confreres (one Filipino, one Mexican and one Fijian) who offer pastoral services in collaboration with the diocese: one coordinating ministry with migrants from the Philippines in Vicenza, another working in prison ministry, and a third working in supporting charity groups at the parish level, in spiritual accompaniment of migrants from Latin America, and receiving and helping those refugees who are accepted in the Veneto region.

### 4. Intercultural Life – *Ad Intra*

MEMBERSHIP	2018	2012	2005
Bishops	1	0	0
Clerics	33	31	33
Brothers (final vows)	3	2	3
Scholastics	2	4	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>43</b>

AGE AND COUNTRY	2018	2012	2005
Average age	56.5	59.1	54.8
Nationalities	14	12	10

**Spirituality:** We are committed to introduce more and more our first missionary St. Joseph Freinademetz and constitute an international community in Oies, as well as to provide services in the pastoral area of Val Badia. An example is the presentation about St. Joseph Freinademetz at the Rimini meeting, thanks to the group of Communion and Liberation.

**Community:** We are in a serious process to ensure that our communities, formed by confreres from different countries, become places where religious want to walk together respecting our diversity.

**Finance:** We educate and encourage the right confreres to be of service in this area and encourage communities that are better off financially to share their surplus revenue with those who are in need.

**Formation:** We hope in the future to organize meetings to improve permanent formation and, secondly, to sponsor the founding of a joint European zone novitiate.