



# PANAM ZONE

<b>ARE</b>	Argentina
<b>ARS</b>	Argentina
<b>BOL</b>	Bolivia
<b>BRA</b>	Brazil & French Guiana
<b>BRC</b>	Brazil
<b>BRN</b>	Brazil
<b>BRS</b>	Brazil
<b>CAM</b>	Nicaragua, Costa Rica & Panama
<b>CHI</b>	Chile
<b>COL</b>	Colombia & Venezuela
<b>ECU</b>	Ecuador
<b>MEX</b>	Mexico & Cuba
<b>PAR</b>	Paraguay
<b>USC</b>	United States, Canada, West Indies & Jamaica
<b>USS</b>	United States
<b>USW</b>	United States



## BLESSINGS, INITIATIVES AND STRATEGIES: PANAM

*“...get rid of your old self... your hearts and minds must be completely new and you must put on the new self...” (Eph 4:22-23)*

More than just a renewal, the American continents long for a new creation, to be recreated from its roots, from its own identity, and from there to recover its courage to project itself to the world in the same spirit of Jesus, the incarnated Word.

### 1. Context

The PANAM Zone is composed of 13 provinces and 3 regions, and we are present in 19 countries. Our missionary work was initiated in America in 1889, reaching a considerable continental expansion in a few decades.

At the dawning of this 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Americas appear much different with respect to past decades. A particular phenomenon, as old as human history itself, has changed its face – the migratory movements. The continent is today home for different ethnic and cultural groups coming from all over the world (not only from Europe and Africa anymore). There is a huge number of people who have found themselves forced to leave their own countries and mi-

grate to other continents; due to unsuccessful attempts, some return to their country, often finding a changed landscape. Inside the continent, this makes for a very complex net of human settlement and migration.

This situation is creating an ever-increasing multicultural richness manifested as a great transformative force; at the same time, it represents a source of constant challenges for coherent existence. In a particular way, the big cities show a new and a very complex human mapping with various aspects, almost going out of control. While this enormous human tide is caused by socio-economic inequalities, the changes produced by these migrations are more accelerated due to societal and governmental activities.

A particular characteristic of our time is the generalized lack of socio-political and religious leaders. Many leaders have gained the sympathy of great human masses, but more from a demagogic and populist profile. Such leadership is derived in ambition and a concentration of power. We are experiencing the degradation of our social institutions, corroded by corruption, which increases mistrust and a sense of impotence among the people. We are challenged by the high amount of aggressiveness and violence

at all levels: in our families, our institutions, our societies. The scourge of drug trafficking continues to affect new generations, corroding them in their very human essence. Another factor that preoccupies us is to see these new generations as distant and even indifferent to our ecclesial structures and practices.

Considering this complex transformation, the Americas continue to be a continent with the highest percentage of Catholics; a true blessing and an enormous challenge. In this land we, Divine Word Missionaries, are serving.

## 2. The Love of Christ urges us – The SVD in the Americas

The love of Christ convoked and sent us as an international religious missionary family to witness to the Kingdom. From our own communitarian conformation, that challenges us to live as *'many faces, only one heart'*; we radiate the love of Christ in our missionary work by building intercultural Christian communities. We are beneficiaries of the same multicultural richness that our societies experience today, and at the same time, we are protagonists of the same challenges that intercultural living entails.

### 3. Rooted in His Word – Life *Ad Intra*

- From an intercultural perspective, our SVD spirituality is enriched constantly by the local theologies and religious expressions, elements, and symbols of our peoples. The relevance of our pastoral biblical animation

in our PRMs is fundamental, emphasizing the centrality of the Word of God as a permanent exercise of discernment, in a way that our criteria are shaped by the Gospel. A way of conversion is to let us be constantly formed by the Word, so we are not asphyxiated in our own structures and practices.

- From an intercultural perspective, our religious communities are multicultural, and in them we are called to grow into intercultural fraternity, a sacrament of the Kingdom. It is right to underline the diversity of venues and programs that favor this intercultural atmosphere in our provinces, and the way we struggle to be doers of humanity in our fraternal ties. A way of renewal is to grow more in the acceptance and appreciation of the other, who is different; thus, the other becomes a gift and a richness.
- From an intercultural perspective, leadership today tends to be more corporative and transforming. Leaders are those who feel animated to animate others in the missionary spirit. Essential to intercultural leadership are the capacity for dialogue and team work. We also need to develop this leadership style in forming the future leaders. A way of conversion is to grow in availability and missionary openness to offer the most suitable confreres for the different levels of leadership.
- From an intercultural perspective, the responsible administration of our resources routes us towards self-reliance and to a greater solidarity with the neediest SVD

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missions. The efforts being made by our PRMs to become self-reliant is notable; yet much more could be done with a simpler life style. Sometimes it is more productive to spend less than to generate more. A way of conversion is to renounce superfluous expenses and think more as a Congregation in our personal management of common resources.

- From an intercultural perspective, formation was, is and will continue being ‘missionary’. We have reached a higher level of mutual knowledge and exchange among the provinces and regions in terms of diverse formative programs and strategies, most especially in the area of vocation promotion and the orientation of new missionaries. *God’s mission* is always what unites us in our diversity. A way to conversion is to orient anew our whole life and our formative programs towards mission, with a spirit of availability and self-giving, avoiding unnecessary selfish demands.

#### 4. Committed to His mission – Life *Ad Extra*

- From an intercultural perspective, we favor the ‘culture of life’. All our PRMs have chosen Family and Youth among their priorities. We recognize the importance of rebuilding our society from our own family homes and the new generations. Vocation promotion and pastoral activities within the Zone are oriented to recreate an atmosphere that would defend and protect life, and that would awaken vocations to the Church. A

way of renewal is to put on a more evangelical life style that would attract young people to participate in the mission.

- From an intercultural perspective, we favor the ‘culture of justice’. In response to one of the mentioned challenges, we have come closer to migrants, excluded and exploited people, the suffering faces of Christ today. We also promote programs that would ‘make justice’ to the environment. VIVAT International is a suitable platform for awareness-raising about concrete socio-economic situations that negatively affect our societies: poverty, gender violence, economic programs based on exploitation and marginality. A way to conversion is more closeness and commitment to the marginalized people today.
- From an intercultural perspective, we favor the ‘culture of co-responsibility’. Our educational institutions are making great efforts to accompany the growth of the new generations towards an integral human formation. This is done on the basis of our SVD charism. We also long for a greater contribution from our centers for studies and research (e.g. Anthopos BRN, CTU – Catholic Theological Union at Chicago, in partnership with other congregations), through our confreres academically prepared in different fields (missiology, anthropology, sacred scriptures, etc.), to reach a deeper level of analysis and commitment with respect to the present times. A way of renewal is to focus again on mission for the Kingdom.

- From an intercultural perspective, we favor a ‘culture of dialogue’. Our peoples in the three Americas have historic memory and need to heal wounds from the past. Recent decades are still accentuating traces of expropriation, mistreatment, marginalization, racism, xenophobia, and political ideologies. This whole situation urges us to become bridges of reconciliation, underlying the supremacy of human dignity and cultural identity of each person above any political or economic interest. A way to conversion is the effort to be signs of communion and mercy (with the Mapuches in CHI, with the Afroamericans in COL and USS, Bilingual Schools in ARE, ethnic groups in Southern MEX).
- From an intercultural perspective, we favor a ‘culture of encounter’. We acknowledge our indigenous peoples’ communities in the Americas and their cultural heritage that enriches and challenges us. However, our pastoral approach to these autochthonous communities is still timid, unstable and unarticulated. Options in favor of indigenous communities are still isolated and require greater conviction on the side of our PRMs, for instance, to identify and prepare dedicated personnel for this area.

In several of these expressions of our mission, we walk together with our SSpS sisters, with the conviction that our missionary service would not be the same without their complementary presence. In a similar way, we acknowledge and appreciate the lay partners’ collaboration,

pushing ahead with our communities, groups, projects, missionary initiatives and various ministries with much evangelical dedication and adherence. There are lay associates groups in PANAM, such as the MAVD in MEX, the Kayros group in USW, the group in CHI, among others. A way to conversion is to detach ourselves a bit more from clericalism and to relate with our sisters and lay people from our common platform that unites us all as children of God.

## 5. Particular Concerns

### *Vocation Promotion*

An initiative at the Zonal level to revitalize our vocation promotion strategies began in 2016. We are concerned with the dwindling number of candidates, as well as the need to favor a ‘culture for vocations’ in the families and Christian communities. We really value the efforts being made in some PRMs, such as the Tri-Provincial Vocation Office in USA and the initiatives on youth ministry in Brazil, Paraguay and Ecuador. Within the frame of vocation promotion, special attention should be given to the Brother’s vocation. The first Brothers Zonal Assembly took place in 2018, and was a key venue to give an impulse to appreciate and promote the Brother’s vocation and ministry.

### *Mission in Venezuela*

The SVD is celebrating its first decade of mission in Maracaibo. It was a matter for evaluation in our last Zonal Assembly in Techny, USC. As a Zone we are convinced of the relevance of this

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missionary endeavor in Venezuela and we desire to strengthen our presence with more personnel and resources. The Divine Word has a

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tor have reinforced the option to continue with this missionary initiative, at the same time that they have been fraternal gestures of closeness to our confreres that accompany these people in the midst of such a critical situation.

### **Geographical Setting of our PRM**

While mission pushes us to go beyond the frontiers, reality in terms of resources and personnel alert us about the risk of dispersion. Our Founder is a model in terms of taking the necessary time to discern, weighing all identifiable factors before initiating a new mission. Without undermining each PRM's autonomy, we are growing in the consciousness of interprovincial and subzonal collaboration (e.g., common formation programs in all of our subzones; joint leadership workshops in Brazil, Andina, and Southern Subzones; missiological workshops and new missionaries' orientation workshops in USA, Brazil and Southern subzones). Considering our Society's history in our continent, the time has arrived to revise our mission posts in terms of territory, availability of personnel and

resources, and the missionary priorities of our PRMs.

### **VIVAT International**

This worldwide institutional platform has not yet entered many of our confreres' minds. In many parts of our continent we live in similar situations that require our networking strategy, among us and with other congregations and organizations that are already doing that from long ago. Realities like forced migration, human trafficking, drug trafficking, human rights violations, open sky mining, and others, can only be addressed through networking. VIVAT is the institutional means to channel our commitment towards more justice and care for our environment in a joint effort.

### **Conclusion**

The animation and coordination dynamic is growing among the members of the PRMs in PANAM and even among our lay partners. We start feeling again the need to come together, to help each other, to discern together certain common situations in our PRMs (vocation promotion, formation, new missionaries' introduction, pastoral challenges, etc.). The practice of formators' gatherings, treasurers' meetings, characteristic dimensions coordinators' workshops, are all greatly contributing to a major fraternal exchange of initiatives and strategies, to gain a common perspective in our continental mission, to value the diversity and to strengthen our common actions.

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