

## BRAZIL – NORTHERN PROVINCE

Official Language: **Portuguese**

### Vision Statement

*Called from different nations and cultures to form missionary communities, to witness to the One and Triune God, we strive: In fostering a harmonious fraternity and an intercultural teamwork among us.*

- *In preparing confreres fit for higher education and willing to assume the pastoral education.*
- *In intensifying vocational promotion in our districts.*
- *To form a committee composed of confreres and lay experts willing to guide the province on its way to self-reliance.*

### Mission Statement

*Enlightened by the Divine Word made man and empowered by the Spirit of the risen Lord, we, the Divine Word Missionaries of the Brazil North Province, commit ourselves:*

- *With the poor and marginalized in both rural and urban areas,*
- *With children and youth who do not have access to education,*
- *With Catholics marginalized from ecclesial life because they have been baptized with little opportunity to mature in the faith.*



### 1. Societal Setting

Brazil is the fifth most populous country on the planet and has one third of the inhabitants of the entire population of Latin America. Since its long colonial history, full of exploitation of Native Amerindians and the African slave trade, it has been a place of fusion of people of different colors and cultures. Regional migration and the abundance of mixed marriages made Brazil one of the most racially diverse countries in the world.

In 1985, after a populist and military government, power was handed over to the democratic regime. Since mid-2014, Brazil has been sub-

merged in a mud of unprecedented political and economic crises. The news released by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) left open an uncertain question: When will the largest economy in Latin America grow again? Oxfam Brazil warns of the "extreme" inequality suffered by the country. In Brazil there is an abysmal distance between who is at the base and who is at the top. The context of economic crisis and liberal reforms undertaken by the Government threaten the achievements made till now. According to World Bank projections, cited by the organization, Brazil could end the year with up to 3.6 million more poor people, which would be added to the more than 16 million already living below the poverty line.

In the regions where the BRN province is involved in ministries, the population reached up to 15.8 million, according to estimates for 2017. In these States there is a majority of whites, blacks and browns, while the indigenous population is very small. In the Northeast region, 56% of the population is below the poverty line, while in the State of Rio de Janeiro, 37.7% is below the poverty line. The literacy rate reaches an average of 92%. The rate of unemployment in Minas Gerais reaches 13.7%, while in Espírito Santo it stands at 14.4%. The majority of the people are still Catholics, but there are cities in Rio de Janeiro, Brasília and Espírito Santo where the number of Protestants is up to 23% - 30%. But in the case of Pedra Azul in Espírito Santo, it reaching close to 65%.

## 2. Ecclesial Setting

Almost three quarters of Brazilians declare themselves Catholics, which makes Brazil appear as the country with the largest Catholic population in the world. But the Brazil Episcopal Conference (CNBB) openly declares that only 20% of baptized Catholics are faithful to the practices of the Church. In fact, a good number among the clergy believe that many Catholics are leaving the Church at a very alarming rate for reasons of religious affiliation or simply abandonment. This tendency is partly explained by the massive migration of the inhabitants of the countryside to the city, since the country is in a rapid process of industrialization and modernization. The rural inhabitants of Brazil have been the force of the Church, while in the great towns and cities different denominations converge and compete against the Catholic faith.

Our missionary collaboration with the local Church occurs in 13 dioceses. Some of the dioceses where we work are quite structured and have a sufficient number of priests. In some dioceses we have been present for a hundred years or more. In these places, our presence and testimony is great and recognized. In others local Churches we are present past 70 years or more.

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have a sufficient number of priests. In some dioceses we have been present for a hundred years or more. In these places, our presence and witness is great and recognized. There are other local churches that have had our service for 70 years or more.

We are integrated into the local Churches based on our parish ministry. We have participated fully in the pastoral life of the dioceses, providing confreres for diocesan councils, coordination of missionary councils, formation in secular seminaries, pastoral commissions of Catholic schools, media and missionary animation.

In general, vocations for the secular clergy have increased while declining for religious life. In Rio de Janeiro, for example, there are 130 seminarians and 60% of their parishes have the diocesan priests. It is true that this is a common situation in large cities and archdioceses. In the interior Churches, many Bishops continue to invite us to assume some parishes, because of the lack of clergy and also because of the specificity of our missionary charism. That is to say, our missionary presence is a gift in many dioceses.

The same distinction must be made in relation to the multicultural situation. In the great centers, there is a cultural and religious diversity, while in the villages, the presence of the church is the strongest expression of faith, solidarity and welcome.

Efforts for ecumenism are particularly significant in the State of Espírito Santo, where the SVD arrived in Brazil to serve German immigrants. There is a strong presence of Lutherans and a good relationship of cooperation between Catholic and Lutheran parishes. With Pentecostal groups dialogue is more difficult, there is a relatively **harmonious coexistence and a few initiatives** are taken but there isn't much cooperation.

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

#### Those in Final Vows

IN ACTIVE MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
<b>Parish</b>	41	47.1	52.0	46.4
<b>Education</b>	0	0	11.4	13.9
Schools	0	-		
Universities	0	-		
<b>Formation/ SVD Vocation</b>	3	3.4	6.9	3.0
<b>Administration/ Support</b>	4	4.6	10.3	3.6
<b>Other Apostolates</b>	11	12.6	3.4	13.9
JPIC	0	-		
Bible	1	-		
Communication	0	-		
Mission Animation	1	-		
Others	9	-		

### Those in Final Vows

NOT IN MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Studies/ Orientation	1	1.1	2.4	5.4
Retired/Sick	13	14.9	14.5	5.2
Others	15	17.2	2.4	5.4

BRN province includes 7 States of the Brazilian federation and the Federal District. Since our Society's arrival in 1895, to work with German immigrants, the SVD has been assuming the mission in places in need of the presence of the Church and with great social challenges. There was also a special interest for work in Christian education. In recent years the province was leaving some places of mission to take over others on the peripheries of large cities, where our presence becomes necessary. Faithful to its history, it continues to support the apostolate in education, looking for new ways of establishing our presence in educational institutions.

### Main Ministries

**Parish Ministry:** Most of the confreres are dedicated to parish ministry. In addition to parishes where our presence dates back to the beginning of the SVD in Brazil, the province has assumed new parishes on the peripheries of the big capitals. To assume them, we had to leave some, prioritizing regions where, in addition to the need of the local church, we have the possibi-

lity of facilitating the community experience with other SVD communities nearby. Currently BRN works in 22 parishes.

**School Ministry:** The province also administers 4 schools with elementary and high school, as well as one university that has 20 colleges as a whole. A great effort was made to overcome the economic difficulties and now it is attempting to integrate the programs of the educational units. The schools and colleges are administered by lay professionals, directly linked to the provincial administration, and the confreres who work in the schools do this service together with their pastoral work.

There is also an educational organization, the *Casa del Hombre de Nazaret*, which works together with children and adolescents in situations of social vulnerability. Besides these ministries our confreres are working in some hospitals as chaplains.

### Characteristic Dimensions

In our mission areas, the four Characteristic Dimensions are lived in the daily life of the parish ministry and our educational institutions. The province seeks to appoint a representative for each dimension.

**Biblical Apostolate:** The biblical dimension is encouraged in the parishes and the provincial coordinator is dedicated to providing formation for the laity. The biblical formation of

the laity is a vital necessity in our parishes and districts.

**Mission Animation:** It marks its presence in some parishes by groups such as those of holy childhood, the celebration

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of the mission month and the SVD Mission Sunday, among other initiatives, such as the SVD Mission Center which collects funds for missions and produces audio visual material. The Mission Center is located in Juiz de Fora. In the local church, the mission secretary is responsible for the mission animation in the archdiocese.

**JPIC:** It is put into practice with the support of social projects and some of these projects are in some of our parishes and schools. Through our works we seek to communicate to others JPIC activities through various means. The JPIC projects which are under the supervision of our parishes are: the council of elders, the care of vulnerable children, education about the environment, and pastoral care among Afro-Brazilians.

**Communication:** There are some initiatives at the level of the mass media in the province. They consist mainly in the production of radio programs, television broadcasts for the Mass, a web page and blogs for the parishes and schools, publication of books and bulletins, etc. We hope to elaborate a plan that includes the creation of an information dissemination center within

the province as well as a training place for the confreres and the lay collaborators in the communication ministry.

### Priorities among Congregational Directions

The priorities chosen by the province for the Congregational Directions of the last General Chapter were:

- Primary and New Evangelization
- Family and Youth
- Education and Research
- Social Justice and Poverty Eradication
- Promoting Culture of Life

The priorities were chosen within what was already done in the parishes, schools and other activities. The activities related to them in the scope of our works were systematized in a Participatory Strategic Plan that is being worked on in our assemblies and meetings. The plan is to expand what is done in one or other parish or school to all existing parishes and schools in the province.

### Collaboration with SSpS and Lay Groups

The collaboration with the SSpS is done in the places where the confreres and Sisters' communities coexist. In the area of formation and vocational promotion there has been progress in closer collaboration with the SSpS. The same happens with other religious congregations in the context of the Conference of Religious of Brazil.

The province seeks to encourage the groups of lay people who identify with our charism, but there is no lay group officially recognized. A group of alumni meet once a year in one of our houses and some of them collaborate sporadically in our activities. There is an attempt to organize a group of lay associates in the Northeast District. A confrere encourages them and is working on the preparation of the statutes.

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

MEMBERSHIP	2018	2012	2005
Bishops	2	2	2
Clerics	74	77	71
Brothers (final vows)	7	8	8
Brothers (temporal vows)	1	1	1
Scholastics	6	6	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>94</b>

AGE AND COUNTRY	2018	2012	2005
Average age	53.5	53.4	55.6
Nationalities	13	14	12

Since the last General Chapter, the province has been searching to deepen our life *ad intra* through the Congregational Directions. During the provincial assemblies, we looked for common ways, discussed and systematized the provincial action plan (The Participatory Strategic Plan).

**Community and Spirituality:** In spirituality and community, in addition to what was already done, such as our three annual meetings (the retreat, the provincial assembly and the provincial fraternization), moments of spirituality and fraternization have been encouraged at the level of local communities. Good initiatives were emerging. In search of greater spiritual renewal, we have insisted on community meetings with the closest communities, where the *Lectio Divina* is followed by a small fraternization. In the districts, where there is greater distance between the mission areas, favorable moments have been sought for reflection and prayer.

**Leadership and Finance:** The leadership has sought to encourage the emergence of leaders in the new generations. In the finances it was possible to find a healing touch to the economic difficulties we went through and establish a fair system, facilitating a better distribution of our money in accordance with the SVD constitutions, and now greater transparency has been urged.

**Ongoing Formation and Formation:** Concerning ongoing formation, we continue to take advantage of the moments of annual meetings for ongoing formation on topics relevant to the life and mission of the province. The training of confreres who want to do relevant studies for their mission area has also been encouraged. In addition to this, we intend to implement a specific training program for the new missionaries.

In the initial formation we have sought to renew the formation team, with the appointment of new confreres for vocational promotion. Our two houses of formation, which were previously located in different cities, are now together in

Belo Horizonte, which facilitates collaboration and exchange between formators and between formation houses. The team of the two houses of formation works together in the selection and accompaniment of the candidates.