

COLOMBIA PROVINCE

Colombia and Venezuela

Official Language: **Spanish**

Vision Statement

Called from different nations and cultures and different backgrounds, we the Divine Word Missionaries are called to serve the people of God in Colombia-Venezuela

- *we are followers of Jesus and we are evangelizers;*
- *we live by the Word and the Eucharist;*
- *we live in fraternal communities, having as our model the Most Blessed Trinity.*

Mission Statement

We, the Missionaries of the Divine Word in Colombia-Venezuela, commit ourselves to prophetic dialogue preferably with:

- *indigenous communities;*
- *migrants displaced by violence;*
- *the baptized that have distanced themselves from the Church.*

To promote our mission, we work in close collaboration with:

- *parish communities;*
- *apostolic Bible groups;*
- *Associates of the “Grupo Editorial Verbo Divino”.*



1. Social Setting

Colombia: It is a country that offers notable contrasts, as much by location as by the people. The mountain ranges are located above the equatorial line; some 50 Amerindian tribes live with their ancestral traditions in forests and plains. Before the Spanish conquest, there were two million Amerindians but today they comprise only 1% of the Colombian population. They are found in the coldest mountain areas, in the lower altitudes, and in modern cities. In the nearby rural areas mestizo farmers cultivate coffee, corn and other crops on their small pieces of land. Approximately three fifths of the population is mestizos. Another fifth is found in coffee producing areas of the country. They have main-

tained themselves as the white Europeans and have not mixed with the indigenous or blacks. Finally, the flat lands of the Atlantic coast are in the hands of owners of large cattle ranches. These belong to three ethnic groups that have developed their own cultural characteristics. Approximately a fifth of the population live in the departments located on the coast and the sugar cane areas. They are descendants of Africans and mulattos, a mixture of Africans and Europeans.

Different from the neighboring countries, Colombia has not received foreign immigrants although there is a small number from the Middle East, Liberia and Asia. They have achieved integration into the society. In the last decades, internal migration is what has changed this country into an intercultural society. People from rural and mountain areas arrive in the cities with the hope of a better salary and better living conditions. Also they have been expelled by the guerrilla groups from the highlands and from the interior areas. As the cities expanded, unemployment increased. There is not enough work for everyone. For this reason many Colombians decided to go to foreign lands, especially Venezuela which was rich in oil, or to the United States. This demographic tendency has caused the loss of specialized manpower in this country and there is the risk of inhuman exploitation in other countries due to the immigrants' illegal entry. Finally, this migration flow has contributed to drug trafficking on an international level and continues to be a social curse that harms all Colombians. Now, due to the present unstable situation in Venezuela, people enter into Colombia creating a very fluid situation.

Venezuela: Like many Latin-American countries, Venezuela has a population with three principle racial lines: mestizos or mulattos/dark skinned, a mixture of descendants from Europe and indigenous (comprising 67% of the population); the white descendants of Europeans are principally Spaniards, Italians and Portuguese (21%); the Negro descendants from Africa and the Caribbean (10%); and the Amerindians or indigenous (2%). These groups are located regionally: the whites and mulattos/dark skinned live in the cities, the indigenous in the remote areas of the interior and the descendants of Africans along the coast line of the Caribbean.

In any case, there is an alarming tendency that is out of control with the trafficking of people. This country is the source, the way and the destination. Young girls and women from the interior are captured and taken to the cities and tourist areas for sexual exploitation. To a lesser extent women from Brazil and Colombia are forced into prostitution within the country, while Venezuelan women are taken to Caribbean islands for the same criminal ends. This panorama is due to the changing social and political situations that have come about under the Bolivarian regime inaugurated by the President, Nicolas Maduro. Now, the economy is in shambles and many people have fled the country.

2. Ecclesial Framework

Colombia: The majority of Colombians are baptized in the Catholic Church, but very few live the faith and go to Church. Many non-prac-

ting Catholics have joined the other Christian denominations, especially Protestants and fundamental groups. There are small contingents of Muslims and Jews and some indigenous communities along with afro-Colombians who follow their ancestral religions. In response to this pluralistic situation the Bishops' Conference of the country has called for a strong pastoral renewal giving emphasis to the formation of ecclesial base communities founded on the Word of God.

In general, the hierarchy does not get involved politically in the public arena. Nevertheless, in recent years some religious men and women have taken a leadership role in the prophetic struggle in favor of human rights, justice and solidarity with the most poor of Colombian society. Some have paid with their lives. Above all, in recent years there has been a dialogue process between the government and the guerilla movement of FARC, in order to end the war and incorporate one of the oldest armed groups in America into the political life.

Venezuela: There is no evidence of the Church in Venezuela in politics. It is all the more weakened for lack of vocations. Many of the priests and religious in pastoral service are foreigners. Consequently the local Church does not have sufficient funds or personnel. In recent decades a great number of progressive religious, priests and bishops are working to get economic and social reforms for the poorest people. But the Catholic hierarchy maintains a traditional, non-political attitude. Today, one has to admire that the Church, little by little, is taking on more cri-

tical role toward the dictatorial regime that President Maduro and his followers are imposing.

3. Intercultural Mission – *Ad Extra*

Those in Final Vows

IN ACTIVE MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Parish	27	57.4	43.4	42.9
Education	0	0	0	5.7
Schools	0	-		
Universities	0	-		
Formation/ SVD Vocation	2	4.2	12.5	10.0
Administration/ Support	2	4.2	12.3	8.6
Other Apostolates	7	14.8	15.6	12.9
JPIC	1	-		
Bible	3	-		
Communication	1	-		
Mission Animation	2	-		
Others	0	-		

Those in Final Vows

NOT IN MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Studies/ Orientation	3	6.4	0	0
Retired/Sick	0	0	0	0
Others	6	12.8	16.2	20.0

The main apostolate of the Congregation in the Colombia–Venezuela province is in parishes. Actually we are working in the dioceses of Quibdó, Montería, the archdiocese of Medellín, Cali, Bogotá and Maracaibo in Venezuela. We take care of 11 parishes. In recent years, we are becoming more conscientious of working in these parishes seeking to implement the Characteristic Dimensions and to make each one a missionary parish. We are on the way but so far without the expected results.

Characteristic Dimensions

Bible Apostolate: In collaboration with the “Grupo Editorial Verbo Divino”, we sell Bibles and related materials for a reasonable price. We also organize study groups to deepen the understanding of the Bible. For this triennium the province has chosen to strengthen the biblical dimension for which a group called SEBIVE (SVD Biblical Service) has been formed with three members of the community who are working not only with the Society but also serving seminaries, parishes, religious congregations and dioceses throughout Colombia.

Mission Animation: We are strengthening missionary awareness as a contribution to the local Church and as a way of taking more seriously our work in this dimension. We try to be involved in our missionary vocation.

JPIC: We live in a society plagued with violence. In this context we work in communities where there is social injustice and ecological des-

truction which demands structural reforms and the protection of the integrity of ecology.

Priorities among Congregational Directions

Promotion of the Culture of Life: Our priorities among the Congregational Directions since the last General Chapter have gone through a change. At a given moment of Colombia, during the peace dialogue between the government and one of the oldest guerrilla movements of America, FARC-EP, we chose the Promotion of the Culture of Life, then, when the accord was reached, we decided in the assembly of 2016 to move to Reconciliation and Commitment for Peace. In each place where we are present we have tried to provide information about the development of the dialogue. Our communities most affected have come to understand the importance and the scope of the dialogue, of the accord when it was signed, and its implementation phase.

To tell the truth, this is a commitment that is very significant and has already caused a lot of interest and involvement for the national and international community. We are making efforts in the parishes but, with the fear of being foreigners, at times we have not achieved much in this priority. With the accompaniment of some afro organizations and with the “Conferencia Nacional de Organizaciones Afrocolombianas” (CNOA) in collaboration with national indigenous organizations, a peace deal is signed now and we are looking forward to its implementation.

As to our lay associates of our congregation, we have begun programs for a greater conscientiousness in the parishes. We lack a structure for this work. We have begun a discussion with interested laity about our life and mission and about our spirituality. We are just taking the first steps.

4. Intercultural Life – *Ad Intra*

MEMBERSHIP	2018	2012	2005
Clergy	43	41	35
Brothers (final vows)	2	2	0
Brothers (temporal vows)	1	2	2
Scholastics	5	7	16
Total	51	52	53

AGE AND COUNTRY	2018	2012	2005
Average age	45.5	44.4	38.2
Nationalities	12	14	14

We are emphasizing community life and the strengthening of the districts. We are coming along well. We promote the formation of the SVD so that the *ad intra* priorities can be carried out: Spirituality, Community, Leadership, Finances and Formation. It has not been easy because in many cases the confreres got trained, then they have to dedicate themselves and give their attention to the parishes. There, the subject

which has been studied is not utilized. Many confreres after studying and being trained think only of doing better in the parishes and do not take on a specific area or get involved in Characteristic Dimension work.

Spirituality: In those places where we work, we are trying to make our spirituality more visible, as religious missionaries as well as members of the SVD. We have been able to do various retreats with this theme and in each community we have insisted that at least they could gather for prayer each day.

Community: We feel that community life is fundamental in these countries as missionaries and religious to support our life. That is why we insist that no confrere in the province works alone. However, giving consideration to the challenges of the lack of personnel and the personalities of some confreres, some prefer to be alone. Here it is necessary to keep trying, but the individualism that the world lives today is a force that attracts us very strongly.

Leadership: In this sense we have been very careful to organize the district meetings, with a proper plan and with a coordinator of the team, and the experience has been very positive. Still, we need to place greater emphasis on ongoing formation in the districts. Nevertheless it is admirable how the coordinators have done the task and have been empowered for this service; the planning for the districts has been carried out.

Finances: We continue to make progress with the organization of the finances of the province in order to make it more understandable for all the members. We are working towards the self-sufficiency of the province even though the economic context of these countries is not easy. We have achieved more clarity towards the few investments that we have. The awareness about contributions to the province has been growing.

Formation: We have approved the plan and follow the directives of the Zone and we participate in sending the students of our province for formation in the common centers. Our experience has not been the best, that's why we believe that there ought to be an evaluation and

modification in some aspects of the program that are still to be implemented.

In relation to the ongoing formation, we have assigned various confreres to do specialized studies to accomplish the work of the province better during these years. We are inclined to carry out a formative community which provides for a candidate to come and learn about us better by being inserted in an actual community, where he is able to study, work and be formed as a religious missionary.

We work in communities where there is social injustice and ecological destruction.