

MEXICO PROVINCE

Mexico and Cuba

Official Language: **Spanish**

Vision Statement

We, Missionaries of the Divine Word in Mexico, are an international and intercultural community of religious missionaries, called to highlight in our lives, in a special way, the Word of God.

We try to collaborate in building the Kingdom of God from the different contexts in which we are inserted: promoting mission animation; biblical apostolate; communication; and justice, peace and integrity of creation.

Mission Statement

We want to do so in an attitude of fraternity, solidarity and prophetic dialogue with our partners, preferably with the marginalized and impoverished.

1. Social Setting

Mexico: Mexico ranks as the 11th most populous country in the world with a population of 130.5 million in 2017. It is a country with diverse multicultural backgrounds and heritage. There are different ethnic groups, namely the Mexican mestizos which account for 62% of the total population, followed by Amerindians (Indigenous groups) with around a 27% share of the general population. Other ethnic groups include the White Mexicans, predominately of European descent, with an estimated 9% of the population in Mexico followed by the Black Mexicans (1%), and Arab Mexicans (1%).

Mexico has one of the largest and most diverse indigenous populations (22.2 million) in Latin America with 62 recognized ethnic groups speaking 62 languages. In the 2005 census only a small fraction of indigenous peoples remain monolingual, with the majority also speaking Spanish. Those who speak an indigenous language are concentrated in Oaxaca, Chiapas, Veracruz,



Puebla, among others. The five predominant languages spoken by indigenous people are Náhuatl, followed by Maya, Zapotec, Mixtec and Otomí.

The Mexican national culture gradually emerged after three centuries of acculturation between the indigenous and the Spanish migrant colonizers. Mexico got its independence in 1821. But unstable governments, military revolts and foreign invasions seriously hampered the construction of the nation. In 1848 Mexico had to cede half of its territory to the United States to end the war between the two countries.

The discussion of national identity in the first instance was based on race. In the Constitution of 1857 equality of racial groups was declared. In recent years, the pre-Columbian descent of the indigenous people is again appreciated. Despite this movement, indigenous people continue to be the poorest and are the most marginalized groups, especially in the south and southeast of the country. Often there are protests, even armed fights, against this situation. Poverty itself is the reason that many indigenous people migrate to the big cities, where they are lost and out of their reality, without much official concern for them. All this becomes more difficult to remedy due to the large numbers of Central American migrants entering the country with the intention of reaching the United States, some fleeing from economic misery, others from situations of violence.

Cuba: At the end of 2016, Fidel Castro died at 90 years of age. Ten years before he transferred power to his brother Raúl. Politically, the socialist system

remains the same and small changes are not structural. Freedom of expression is still lacking.

But certain changes are noticed. The establishment of relations with the United States and the visit of President Obama were viewed positively, but a sense of frustration prevails after the surprise election of Donald Trump as his successor. The majority of the people live in poverty, collecting their salaries in Cuban pesos. The aging of the population increases. Transportation is still very poor. Currently, Cuba suffers due to the fall in the world price of oil. This caused a sharp decrease in the support previously received from Venezuela. Their greatest income comes from tourism, from remittances from migrants, and from the foreign missions of doctors and teachers.

2. Ecclesial Setting

Mexico: The Church in Mexico is generally considered conservative, but there are attempts in some dioceses to move from the traditional "*sacramentalism*" to the "new evangelization" in its pastoral approach. Pope Francis has urged the hierarchy to be more active in this regard, and lay parishioners to be more visible in political affairs. There are no ecumenical or interreligious collaborative efforts, except on particular occasions, and then at the level of the high officials.

Because the Church has been powerful in Mexican history, its relationship with the State has been, at times tense, and at other times openly hostile. In fact, the Constitution imposes

a strict separation between Church and the State. In 1992, after several attempts for closeness between the State and the Vatican, the government recognized the legal personality of "religious associations" and restored a number of rights, but not all the religious freedom that the Church required. For example, they still do not have religious training in public schools, the right to ownership of mass media, and parents cannot decide on the education of their children.

In 2017, of the 130.5 million inhabitants in Mexico, 87.99% are Catholics, 5.20% are Protestants, 2.07% are from other Christian denominations, 0.05% are Jewish, and 0.31% are from other religions, 3.52% are atheists or agnostics.

Cuba: Despite the government's effort to eliminate religious sense and belonging to the Church, the Cuban people maintain an appreciation for the religious. The manifestations of syncretism such as "*santería*" and "*espiritismo*" grow. The sects also have increased.

The Church in Cuba has good pastoral plans, after consulting the communities. The priorities until 2020 are: the announcement of an open and missionary Church; Christian initiation and formation; a Church that attracts, guides, forgives, reconciles and projects a Christian future full of hope; the family and the community; a Church that creates spaces of communion, commitment and Christian witness; and a Church that lives its faith in the community.

The pastoral care of the Church in Cuba has a strong missionary dimension. Bishops are very close to lay people, priests, religious men and women. Everyone is involved in the different pastoral services. Half of the priests and men and women religious come from different countries of the world. There are few native vocations. Economically, the Church in Cuba depends almost exclusively on the help that comes from abroad. The collaboration of the laity is very small due to their poor income; therefore, it is required that pastoral activities are subsidized with international aid.

3. Intercultural Life – *Ad Extra*

We share our lives and mission in intercultural communities at the service of the people in the parishes entrusted to the Society. We put special emphasis on our Characteristic Dimensions.

Those in Final Vows

IN ACTIVE MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Parish	40	52.6	54.2	52.3
Education	2	2.6	0	1.6
Schools	0			
Universities	2			
Formation/ SVD Vocation	5	6.6	11.8	10.2
Administration/ Support	3	3.9	5.1	12.5
Other Apostolates	14	18.4	15.2	7.8

MEX

JPIC	1	-		
Bible	2	-		
Communication	1	-		
Mission Animation	1	-		
Book Stores	5	-		
Others	4	-		

Those in Final Vows

NOT IN MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Studies/Orientation	3	3.9	8.5	4.7
Retired/Sick	1	1.3	3.4	0
Others	8	10.5	1.8	10.9

Main Ministries

Parish Ministry: It is significant that most of our missionary commitment is in the parish - indigenous, urban, and semi-urban parishes. Actually, 52.6% of confreres work in parish ministry. It can be seen that in our parish communities the confreres are aware of the importance of building missionary communities with an SVD imprint.

Indigenous People Ministry: We appreciate the enthusiasm of the confreres who dedicate their lives to indigenous mission areas, because it is an area that involves greater effort and dedication to enter the indigenous space and worldview in

an environment far from the big cities. Being an SVD in this environment is manifested in the accompaniment of the peoples in their efforts to preserve the values of indigenous culture, and to share in the intercultural mission – learning the local language, being in solidarity with their poverty and marginalization, understanding their own rituals and customs, etc. It is not a simple task. The provincial council has chosen to implement, as a policy, that indigenous ministry is included as a first assignment for those who join the province.

Urban and semi-urban Ministry: In the same way, we value the work of the confreres in the urban and semi-urban ministry. Many of these parishes function according to the Pastoral Plan of their respective dioceses; however, they effectively implement the Characteristic Dimensions of our Society, which identifies us as SVD missionaries.

Characteristic Dimensions

At the provincial level, we were able to work more in the biblical apostolate, mission animation and JPIC. A coordinator for each of these dimensions is appointed and they work with missionary commitments in the province.

Biblical Apostolate: A biblical workshop and *Lectio Divina* are offered yearly at the provincial level, with the participation of the confreres and our lay partners. In addition, the provincial coordinator, together with the parish priests of the parish communities, plan and offer courses

and workshops for the pastoral workers. Biblical animation takes place in biblical groups that usually meet weekly for reflection and share the Word of God in the houses of prayer or in family homes.

Mission Animation: It is carried out in collaboration with the Misioneros Auxiliares del Verbo Divino (MAVD) and the vocational promoter. The mission secretary visits and encourages the different groups that are in Guadalajara, Mexico City, Saltillo, Aguascalientes, Querétaro, Zapotlanejo, Morelos, etc. When there is a priestly ordination of the SVD confreres, they carry out a one-week mission animation within the parish community. Also, on the occasion of World Mission Sunday, activities of mission animation are organized in the different SVD parish communities.

JPIC: The JPIC coordinator has made an effort to visit each community and offer workshops on justice and peace and the integrity of creation. In some parishes, he collaborates with the Program of Social Projection of the respective diocese. The parish of Salto de Agua works with Central American migrants, offering them attention, food and lodging, in coordination with the other existing centers for migrants in the diocese. A house meant specifically for migrants is currently under construction - «Betania de Santa Martha».

Communication: At the beginning of this triennium, we appointed a communication coordinator for the province. We hope that soon a concrete project can be developed and he can coordinate with the different areas of our apostolate.

Priorities among Congregational Directions

The priorities of MEX province are: New evangelization, and Family and Youth. The different communities have drawn up their programs and action plans, and have taken steps to implement them, although an efficient way of evaluating them remains to be established.

Collaboration with SSpS and the Local Church

The collaboration with the SSpS is limited to the parish ministry in the different areas such as: catechesis, youth, families, social reality, and liturgy. Currently, we are developing a joint work plan for the service of migrants.

It is noteworthy that several confreres collaborate at the diocesan level, providing special services to the local church in positions of dean, presbyteral councilor, vicar of religious life, diocesan treasurer, episcopal pro-vicar and vicar.

SVD Lay Partners

At the provincial level, there is a close relationship with the Misioneros Auxiliares del Verbo Divino (MAVD). This is one of the lay partners groups in our Society. In addition to their specific advisor, several confreres help them in their formation in the spheres of spirituality, mission, finances and human development. We have opened spaces for participation of the MAVD in our assemblies, something highly valued by the laity as well as by the SVD.

There is a very good participation of the laity in our parishes with very well defined spaces and with responsibilities within the ecclesial community. In addition, it seeks to provide training in different areas in order to promote greater commitment on their part. The MAVD, together with the new missionary confreres, and the seminarians from theology and philosophy studies, carry out together the Holy Week Mission and other programs in the summer in indigenous communities and SVD parishes.

4. Intercultural Life – *Ad Intra*

MEMBERSHIP	2018	2012	2005
Clerics	72	74	61
Brothers (final vows)	2	1	3
Scholastics	12	11	14
Novices	2	0	5
Total	88	86	83

AGE AND COUNTRY	2018	2012	2005
Average age	45.8	43.5	40.3
Nationalities	15	14	10

Spirituality: We constantly encourage all the entities of the province to continue with the practice of community prayer, *Lectio Divina*, Eucharistic celebration, etc. At the provincial level, each year we have a week's study and biblical reflection; the biblical apostolate coordinator organizes this program. We have some activities within the communities and entities such as, implementing

the *Lectio Divina*, organizing reflections or tri-duums regarding our patron saints and significant feasts of our Society.

Community: As a community, we seek to achieve greater openness and sensitivity to the cultural diversity of those who integrate into the missionary community. We strive to achieve this so that diversity does not isolate us, but transforms us in order to bring true collaboration to the service of community life. We schedule meetings more frequently to resolve differences or important issues that affect community life. We value what the confreres do in the community and we keep a mutual respect between us.

Leadership: Within the province, we promote the exercise of leadership with humility and responsibility. Regarding shared leadership, we collaborate with others, participate in dialogue and delegate responsibilities. To promote this, workshops have been organized for the entire province so that all take an active role in leadership. There have been joint meetings of the provincial council and local superiors, twice a year or according to the needs, to try to share responsibilities and give the districts support in their journey. We also want to prepare missionaries to be leaders, from the initial formation, fostering greater integration and participation in the various *ad intra* and *ad extra* service roles in our province.

Finances: As a province, we are conscious of leading a simple life and using the goods and resources of the Society for the service of our

life, our mission *ad extra*, our support for the social commitment of the Church and caring for those most in need of our communities. The macroeconomics of the province has been stable up to now, but there is a concern for the near future. The Verbum Bookstores, the self-reliant parochial communities and the investment interests in Mexico contribute most of the income to cover the deficit of the province, including the district of Cuba. The provincial treasurer, together with professional auditors, conducts an annual audit of the finances of the province before the close of the fiscal year.

Formation: A committee has been established to evaluate and update the formation program of the province. Four confreres, involved in the formation area at different levels, are taking the

time to evaluate, analyze, elaborate and present a new program that will guide the formation in the province.

The formation team, the formators of each stage – vocational promotion, aspirancy, philosophy and postulancy, novitiate, theology – meet twice a year to evaluate, plan and implement the formation project of the province. We have invited other provinces to send students for their theological formation in our province. We have a theological study center suitable for our identity and an adequate infrastructure for an international community to study theology.

The ongoing formation facilitates a spiritual renewal through the retreats that are offered at different times, especially in Lent and Advent.