

USA – WESTERN PROVINCE

Official Language: **English**

Vision Statement

We are bridges among peoples.

Mission Statement

As an international religious community we live the spirit of Arnold Janssen. We proclaim the Word in diverse ministries in a distinctly multicultural corner of the world focusing on the poor and the marginalized and promoting unity in diversity.

1. Social Setting

The United States of America Western Province (USW) is located in California, in the southwestern part of the country. The United States has always been a melting pot of cultures and traditions. People of various ethnicities, languages, races and beliefs have always lived in harmony and have worked hard together to build the history and economy of the country. All the same, the presidential election that took place in 2016 seems to have created a great uncertainty and intolerance among the people. The same elements that united the people like color, ethnicity, language and religion seem to be the factors dividing them today. All of these seem to have stemmed from the divisive, negative rhetoric and the pessimistic approach by the politicians and is being carried



forward even after the elections. There is uncertainty among the people with regard to immigration and health care programs. Some States like California are trying to protect the rights and stability of the immigrant families. National and state level discussions on gender and sexual orientation have taken a center stage. There seems to be less tolerance and acceptance.

2. Ecclesial Setting

Dioceses are trying to diminish the tension and give a sense of hope through various pro-

grams. There is an invitation to collaborate with the system, to embrace the immigrants and not to separate families. Efforts are made to provide ample opportunities through collective action with other Churches and organizations like ecumenical endowers. The strength of Church attendance has grown in the last few years in spite of the negative criticism and portrayal by the media. This seems to be resulting from the growth of the Hispanic Catholic community and the Asian Catholic minority communities like the Filipinos, Vietnamese, Chinese, Indians, Koreans, etc.

This scenario has posed a lot of challenges to the local dioceses in catering to the needs of these communities. All the dioceses have created special programs to cater to the Hispanic community, the second largest community today. Every parish has a few Spanish Masses on weekends to attend to their needs. Spanish has become mandatory. There are also parishes only catering to these groups. Two of the SVD parishes in the province serve only the Hispanic community. This gives us an added responsibility to concentrate on the importance of Spanish as a second language as well as to become aware of the cultural aspects involved.

There is great need for more vocations presently as the number of local priests is declining and there are very few that now respond to the call. At the same time it is encouraging that some of our SVD parishes in the province have been able to get vocations. There are four seminarians in formation from two of our parishes.

3. Intercultural Mission – *Ad Extra*

Those in Final Vows

IN ACTIVE MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Parish	33	47.8	46.9	29.8
Education	1	1.4	3.1	7.3
Schools	1	-		
Universities	0	-		
Formation/ SVD Vocation	0	0	0	0
Administration/ Support	3	4.3	7.5	8.9
Other Apostolates	14	20.2	7.5	8.6
JPIC	0	-		
Bible	3	-		
Communication	3	-		
Mission Animation	0	-		
Others	8	-		

Those in Final Vows

NOT IN MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Studies/ Orientation	0	0	1.5	0
Retired/Sick	10	14.4	20.3	14.5
Others	9	13.0	13.2	21.0

The main ministry of the province is pastoral. This calls for a great deal of collaboration with the diocese and its diocesan policies, ministries and activities. The SVD communities are in the dioceses of Oakland, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, San Diego, Orange and San Francisco. The province office is in Riverside. Today we are a multi-ethnic missionary community that gives witness to the Word and responds to the current needs of the local Church. Our confreres are responding to various pastoral needs. They are working as pastors, chaplains in hospitals, prisons and a convent, retreat ministry, diocesan offices, ministry among the Chinese and Polish communities, special ministries such as Bible ministry and preaching the Word of God through mass media, etc.

Special Ministries

Wordnet Productions with media and communication, Ministerio Bíblico Verbo Divino (MBVD) with Bible Apostolate, and Vietnamese Charitable Association (VCA) with charitable activities, are three specialized ministries in the province. There are three confreres involved in communication, three others in the biblical apostolate, and one with VCA.

VCA reaches out to needy people in Vietnam through other religious orders and through our province in Vietnam. The main goal of the institution is to generate funds for distribution for charitable institutions in Vietnam. VCA also contributes to the generalate annually for distribution.

A confrere offers interculturality training and facilitates intercultural relations at the local and international level.

Protecting Children and the Vulnerable

The province is a member of the 'Conference of Major Superiors of Men' (CMSM) for the past many years. Following up on the decision of the USCCB, the province has been organizing workshops and seminars on creating safe environments for children. The province has its own sexual abuse policy which every member has to study and accept. Every member is also participating in the safe environment programs organized by the dioceses. The province has been accredited with *Praesidium* an organization recognized by CMSM for child safety programs. This accreditation is renewed annually.

Characteristic Dimensions

We have been trying to live out our characteristic dimensions through our parish ministry. It is through our collaboration with the dioceses and following the varied ministries that each of the dioceses has. We wholeheartedly participate in all of them and bring in our SVD flavor.

One of the resolutions of the recent provincial chapter has been to formulate an SVD parish profile. It follows the model of the parish profile published by the Generalate and customizes it to suit our particular situation. This focuses on the various activities in the parishes from an

SVD perspective. The parish profile we prepared helps us keep in mind our Characteristic Dimensions. Implementation of the parish profile will automatically result in a collaboration of the dimensions. All our parishes are multicultural. There is growing number of Hispanics in all the parishes and we are emphasizing the need for Spanish language for all the confreres so they can be effective in their ministry.

Biblical Apostolate: Ministerio Bíblico Verbo Divino (MBVD) is the Bible ministry of the province. MBVD reaches thousands, mainly among the Spanish speaking, with its Bible and Bible related literature distribution. Today

Wordnet Productions reaches thousands of households weekly through its programs.

MBVD has grown to be the major distributor of Spanish Bibles in the country. It works closely with Editorial Verbo Divino (EVD) in Spain. It also runs a weekly Bible program at the center. The biblical coordinator of the apostolate also works in close collaboration with MBVD. The coordinator and MBVD work together to organize biblical programs. Besides the coordinator there are two SVDs, one full time and one part time, involved in this ministry.

In the last couple of years we have been organizing youth encounters and Bible workshops and seminars for the SVD parishes. The participation in these encounters has been very

encouraging where we are able to address and inspire hundreds of youth and give them an awareness of the Society. The Bible workshops enable people to establish Bible study groups in their own parishes and be blessed by the Word of God.

Communication: Wordnet Productions is the major media activity of the province. Wordnet Productions reaches thousands of households weekly through its national television programs and the daily reflection Apps, *iGod Today* in English and *Dios Habla* in Spanish. Wordnet has been involved with the mass media and communication for more than 25 years. It has a great infrastructure thanks to the hard work of three SVDs and the staff. There are also two religious Sisters collaborating with us in this ministry. Wordnet is launching a web channel where programs of Wordnet and others will be aired. The channel will be available on electronic devices and television through Roku, Apple TV, Amazon and Google TV, etc. It would highlight activities of the SVDs in the Northern Subzone initially and later expand to others.

Priorities among Congregational Directions

The chosen priorities of USW from the 2012 general chapter are **Migration, Family and Youth, Promotion of the Culture of Life, Primary and New Evangelization**. These priorities have been part of our ministries and all efforts have been taken to implement them.

- SVD parishes coming together, along with the four dimension coordinators to share and evolve a common plan on migration for our parishes.
- Following the plans, programs and reformation of USCCB, CMSM and the dioceses on immigration.
- Organizing workshops on immigration policies and laws at our parishes by our immigration lawyer.
- Giving prime importance to the religious education and youth ministries by creating spaces for evangelization.
- Forming ministries in the parishes that can meet the needs of the community and give opportunities for more participation.
- Promoting and training the lay people in various ministries and catechetical programs.
- Ministry to care for everyone who is in need pastorally like the gays and lesbians.
- Promoting family values, family prayer and care for the home bound and the elderly.
- Encouraging lay associations in the parishes.
- Joining hands with the movement against capital punishment and abortion, along with treating respectfully the elderly and the homebound.
- Producing programs on the above mentioned topics and airing them on national

television and later making it available through social media and ministry websites.

- Organizing Bible workshops for SVD parishes.
- Creating Bible study groups in parishes.
- Organizing SVD Week in parishes.
- Organizing or getting involved with inter-religious dialogues. Creating programs on inter-religious discussions.

Collaboration with the Laity

Collaboration with the laity has been highlighted in the province through the parish ministry. The province has a coordinator for ministry with the laity. There are two SVD parishes actively involved with laity formation on SVD spirituality with regular formation and animation programs called Ministerio Laicos Verbo Divino (MLVD). The members of the MLVD come together for Bible sharing and Bible study regularly. They also make an annual commitment to the Society. One of the groups has opened a Catholic store to sell and distribute religious articles and Bibles. This center is also for evangelization as they organize periodic programs like music nights and other activities.

We have also been associating with Lay Mission Helpers (LMH). One of our confreres serves as its board member. They train volunteers for various missions and they work for six months to a year in some mission countries.

4. Intercultural life – *Ad Intra*

MEMBERSHIP	2018	2012	2005
Clergy	66	65	55
Brothers (final vows)	2	6	7
Brothers (temporal vows)	0	0	2
Scholastics	1	1	0
Total	69	72	64

AGE AND COUNTRY	2018	2012	2005
Average age	56.9	58.6	58.2
Nationalities	16	16	16

Spirituality: To build up a strong spiritual foundation among the confreres, the province organizes yearly retreats at the province level and recollections at the district level. The participation is very good. Confreres actively participate in the retreats and recollections organized by their respective dioceses. The feast of our founder and annual province level jubilee celebrations are also occasions of spiritual experience as a community.

Community: Our internationality and our ability to live together is a source of inspiration to many people. In most of our parishes we have confreres coming from different countries. The common celebrations of Christmas and other SVD feasts are eagerly awaited and celebrated together at our main community and well attended. Confreres are also regular at the district meetings and gatherings.

Finance: The province is self-reliant. Confreres contribute to the general fund of the province. During the province meetings the income and expenditure of the province, as well as its current financial position are made known to the confreres, thus making for financial transparency in the province. We have also introduced an annual contribution from all the SVD parishes through a second collection.

Leadership: The provincial administration encourages every parish to develop lay associates who can be entrusted with the various ministries, thus empowering them with authority. We encourage lay leadership and active participation. In the province we organize periodic leadership seminars for the members.

Ongoing Formation: Newly arrived confreres are given the opportunity to learn Spanish. They are sent to one of the Spanish speaking countries to study the language. The week-long, internationally known Religious Education Congress is a major source of on-going formation for many of our confreres. Each diocese also organizes several clergy study days to update on current issues of the Church. The mission secretary helps newly assigned confreres to the province to get enculturated into the American way of life, language and beliefs. USW accepts CTP seminarians. A multi-cultural pastoral site is chosen for a particular seminarian so that he has an opportunity to learn, develop and deepen his own religious vocation through living and working with our SVD priests and Brothers.