svd brothers FORUM

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Brothers as LEADERS

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BROTHERS AS LEADERS...

This issue of SVD Brothers Forum is about BROTHERS AS LEADERS.
To introduce this topic, here is a story from many years ago. A Junior Brother was approached by an SVD priest approached. He said, "I really pity you because you are talented, but you will spend your entire life in subordinate work. That is the destiny of Brothers." Even at that time, however, there were SVD Brothers serving in important leadership positions, such as the late Br. Vinzenz von Holzen, who headed the General Affairs Division at Fu Jen University in Taiwan. Since then, our Society has continued to evolve. Today, as the number of Brothers gradually declines, a growing proportion of them are being entrusted with leadership responsibilities. The Philippine Provinces offer an encouraging example of this development.

To contribute to this issue of the SVD Brothers Forum, we kindly invite you to reflect on the following questions. They are formulated in such a way that even communities without working Brothers can participate.

1. How can we foster a synodal culture in which leadership is understood not as a matter of clerical status or authority, but as a shared missionary service entrusted to those whose gifts, competence, and vocation best serve the community and the mission?
2. In your community or country, in what ways can SVD Brothers inspire others to develop a spirit-filled work ethic?
3. If young Brothers were assigned to your mission area, what educational background or professional preparation would they need in order to serve effectively under the typical conditions of your country?
4. How do the confreres in your community view Brothers—whether in your own province or in other zones—who discern leadership positions as an expression of their missionary vocation and commitment?

Please read the sharing of our confreres.

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LEADERSHIP AS MISSIONARY SERVICE

Who is best equipped, gifted, and called to serve the community and the mission in this particular responsibility?

This is a question worth asking as we continue our journey toward a more synodal way of being Church and of living our missionary vocation. Synodality invites us to look at leadership with fresh eyes and to recover something fundamental: leadership is not a privilege, but a service; not a matter of status, but a responsibility entrusted for the good of the community and the mission.

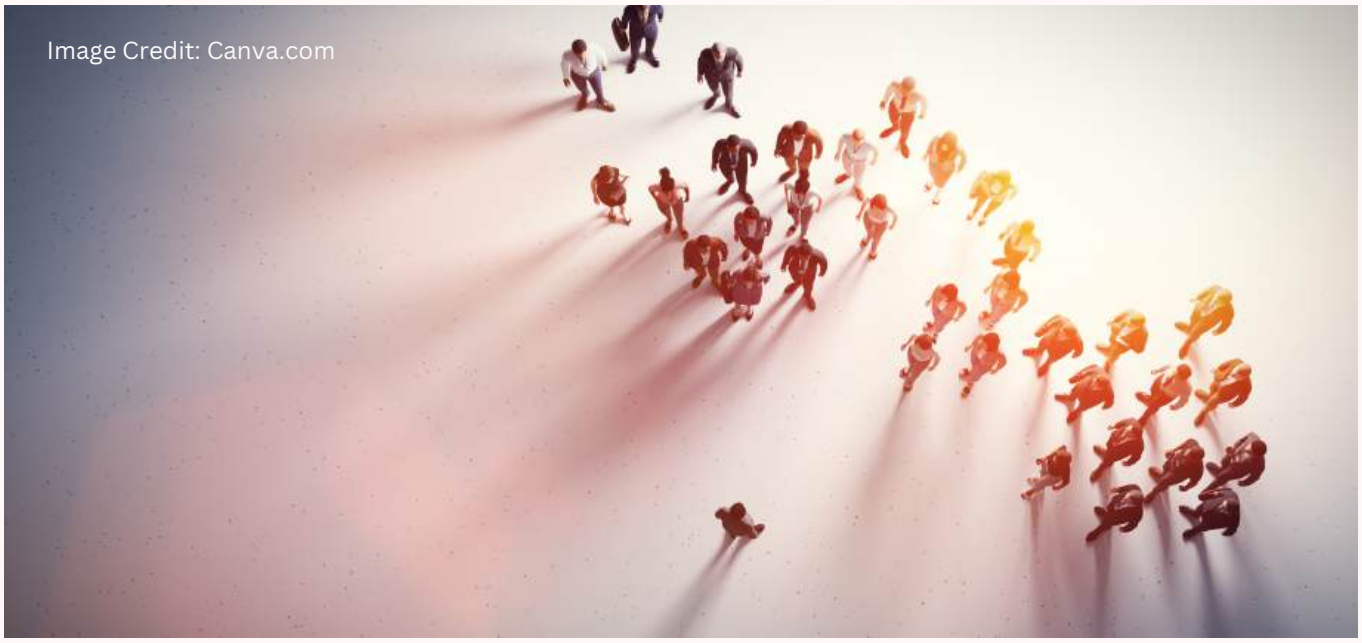
The story of David's anointing offers us a beautiful biblical perspective on the discernment of leadership. When Samuel was sent to the house of Jesse to anoint the one chosen by God, he initially looked at Jesse's older and seemingly more impressive sons. Yet God reminded him that human beings look at appearances, while the Lord looks at the heart (1 Sam 16:7). David, the youngest, was not even initially presented to Samuel. He was out tending the sheep. Yet it was precisely this young shepherd whom God had chosen.

This story reminds us that God's criteria are not always the same as ours. We can easily be influenced by what is visible: age, seniority, position, experience, nationality, academic qualifications, or social standing. These things may have their value, but they do not necessarily reveal a person's capacity to serve as a leader. The Lord sees deeper. He sees the heart, the gifts, the motivations, the capacity to serve, and the vocation of each person. Synodal discernment therefore calls us to look beyond appearances and to ask where the gifts that the Spirit has given to a person can best serve the community and the mission.

In our missionary life, leadership should be entrusted to those whose gifts, competence, vocation, social skills, and character enable them to serve others and advance the mission. The question should not simply be, "Who has the position or the status?" but rather, "Who has the gifts and capacity to serve this particular responsibility well?" Such a vision calls us to appreciate leadership as an expression of communion, discernment, and missionary service.

Br. Carlos Ferrada Montero | PHS
Hermanos SVD Supervisor del Foro

LEADERSHIP AS MISSIONARY SERVICE (CONT.)



From this perspective, whether a person is a priest or a brother should not, in itself, determine his suitability for leadership. What matters is his capacity to serve, accompanied by competence, emotional and social maturity, good character, integrity, genuine friendship with the Lord, missionary commitment, a listening heart, the ability to work collaboratively, and a sincere willingness to serve. Ultimately, Christian leadership must be rooted in a personal relationship with Christ. A leader who is a friend of the Lord can allow prayer and the Gospel to shape his decisions, relationships, and way of serving others.

This is particularly important for us as members of the Society of the Divine Word. We are a missionary congregation blessed with priests and brothers who bring different gifts, experiences, cultures, competencies, and perspectives. These differences are not a weakness; they are a richness for our common mission. A synodal Society seeks to recognize these gifts, discern them together, and place them where they can best contribute to the life of the community and the mission of the Church.

The approach to leadership promoted by Pope Francis has helped the Church to deepen its understanding that leadership and sacramental ordination are not always synonymous. The increasing participation of lay people, religious sisters, and brothers in significant responsibilities within the Church, including the Roman Curia, reminds us that authority for service can be exercised through different vocations, charisms, competencies, and forms of participation. This can also challenge us, as religious missionaries, to recognize more fully the leadership gifts present among our brothers and to create opportunities for these gifts to serve the mission.

For us, therefore, fostering a synodal culture of leadership requires more than changing procedures. It requires a change of mentality. Those entrusted with leadership are not called to stand above the community, but to serve within and for the community. Leadership is something entrusted, not possessed; it is received for the sake of others and ultimately for the sake of the mission.

LEADERSHIP AS MISSIONARY SERVICE (CONT.)

Likewise, synodal leadership calls each of us to take responsibility for the community. We are invited not only to discern who should lead, but also to support those who are entrusted with leadership, to listen to one another, to value different gifts, and to create an environment where people can offer their best for the mission.

May this reflection encourage us to build communities where leadership is recognized as service, authority is exercised with humility, competence is valued, gifts are discerned together, and every vocation is given the opportunity to contribute to the mission.

May our friendship with the Lord remain the foundation of all our service. And may the Spirit continue to guide us in discerning not simply who should lead, but how we can all become servants of the mission entrusted to us by Christ and the Church.

Image Credit: Canva.com

A LIBERATING TASK OF THE SVD MISSIONARY RELIGIOUS

Br. Raul Acosta | Generalate's Assistant for Brother Formation

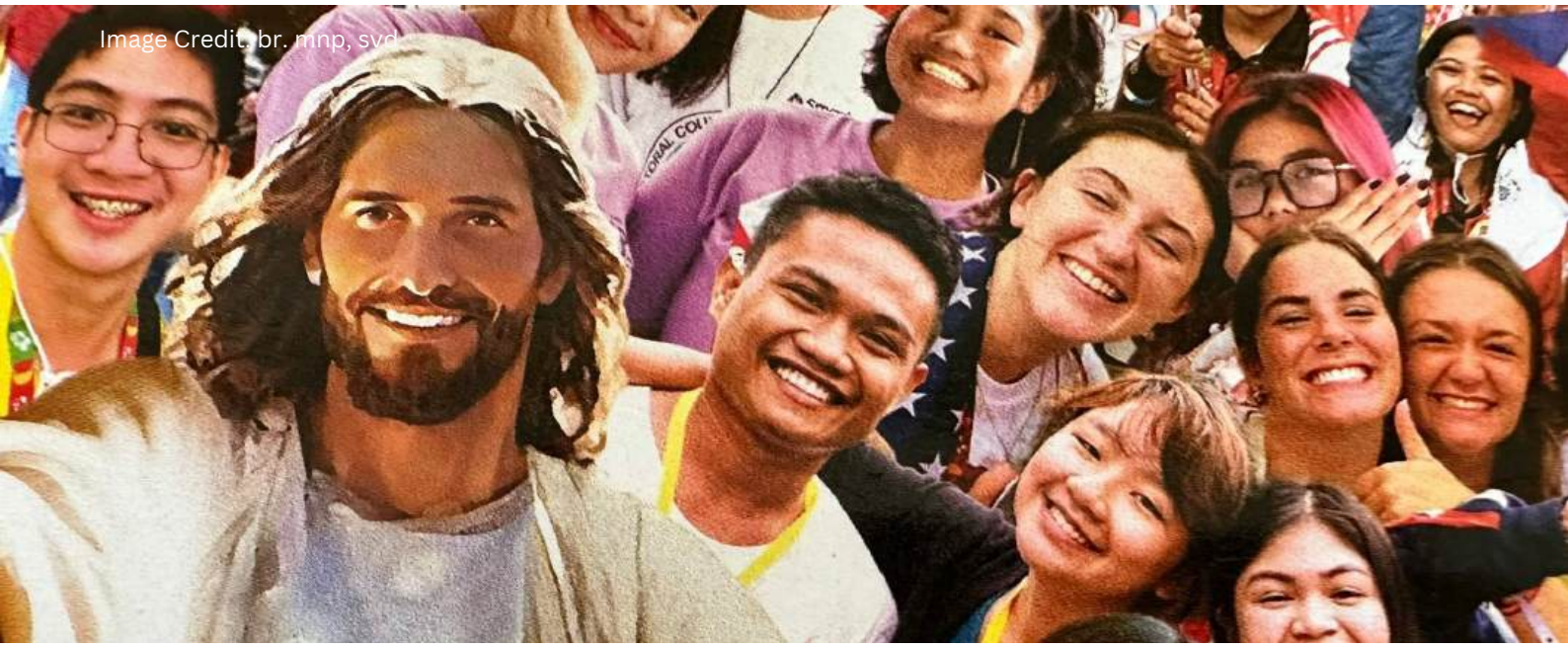
Introduction

In the journey of the synodal Church, the call to be servant leaders is not merely an organizational strategy, but the very essence of the charism and vocation of the Divine Word Missionary Religious (SVD). In a world fractured by inequalities, isolation, and a crisis of meaning, leadership is not exercised through power or hierarchy, but through service, encounter, and the capacity to turn our gaze toward the wounds of humanity. The aim of this text is to reflect on the theological, prophetic, and communal dimensions of this leadership, taking the life of Jesus as its foundation and allowing ourselves to be enlightened by the teachings of Pope Francis in Evangelii Gaudium and Fratelli Tutti. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

1. Christological Foundation and Vocational Call

The servant leadership of the missionary religious is founded on the person of Jesus. As missionary disciples in a synodal Church, we want to be servants dedicated to the mission in the world. By choosing this consecrated life as baptized individuals with a special vocation within the Church, we have felt the particular call to follow Jesus through religious profession, imitating the historical way in which the Lord himself lived: being witnesses and prophets of hope in this wounded world marked by inequalities. In this context, Pope Francis reminds us of the dynamic dimension of mission: "Mission in the heart of the people is not a part of my life, or an ornament I can take off, it is not an appendage or just another moment of existence. It is something I cannot tear from my being if I do not want to destroy myself." "I am a mission on this earth, and that is why I am in this world." (Evangelii Gaudium, 273)

Image Credit: br. mnp, svd



"He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners… and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'" (Lk 4:16-19)

2. A Liberating and Prophetic Task

The servant leadership of the missionary disciple is also a liberating task from the perspective of Jesus, who calls us to be instruments capable of transforming realities. Today we face various false proposals in a world marked by individualism, isolation, and materialism, which promote a superficial life. In response to this, we are invited to a new prophetic role:

3. Transparency, Care, and Fraternal Service

Being servant leaders in a synodal Church implies commitment and constant effort.

For many years, the Church was reluctant to speak openly about the domination and control of some over others—a topic I recognize may be uncomfortable for some. However, our times demand care and respect for others. The Church has begun to reflect seriously on the abuses committed within its institutions (spiritual and of conscience), which requires us to be mature enough to embrace our own humanity and take responsibility for our history. This means being faithful to the Lord's call and maintaining our convictions even in the darkest of times. Regarding the need to overcome self-referentiality and embrace shared vulnerability, Francis warns us: "The human person, with his or her inalienable rights, is naturally open to relationships. At his or her very root lies the call to transcend himself or herself in encounter with others." (Fratelli Tutti, 111) The proposal is to be servant leaders as religious brothers who genuinely care about the lives of others, the good of communities, and helping others to live better through listening.

Image Credit: br.mnp, svd

THE DISTINCTION IS NO LONGER RELEVANT

Fr. Rüdiger Brunner | GER

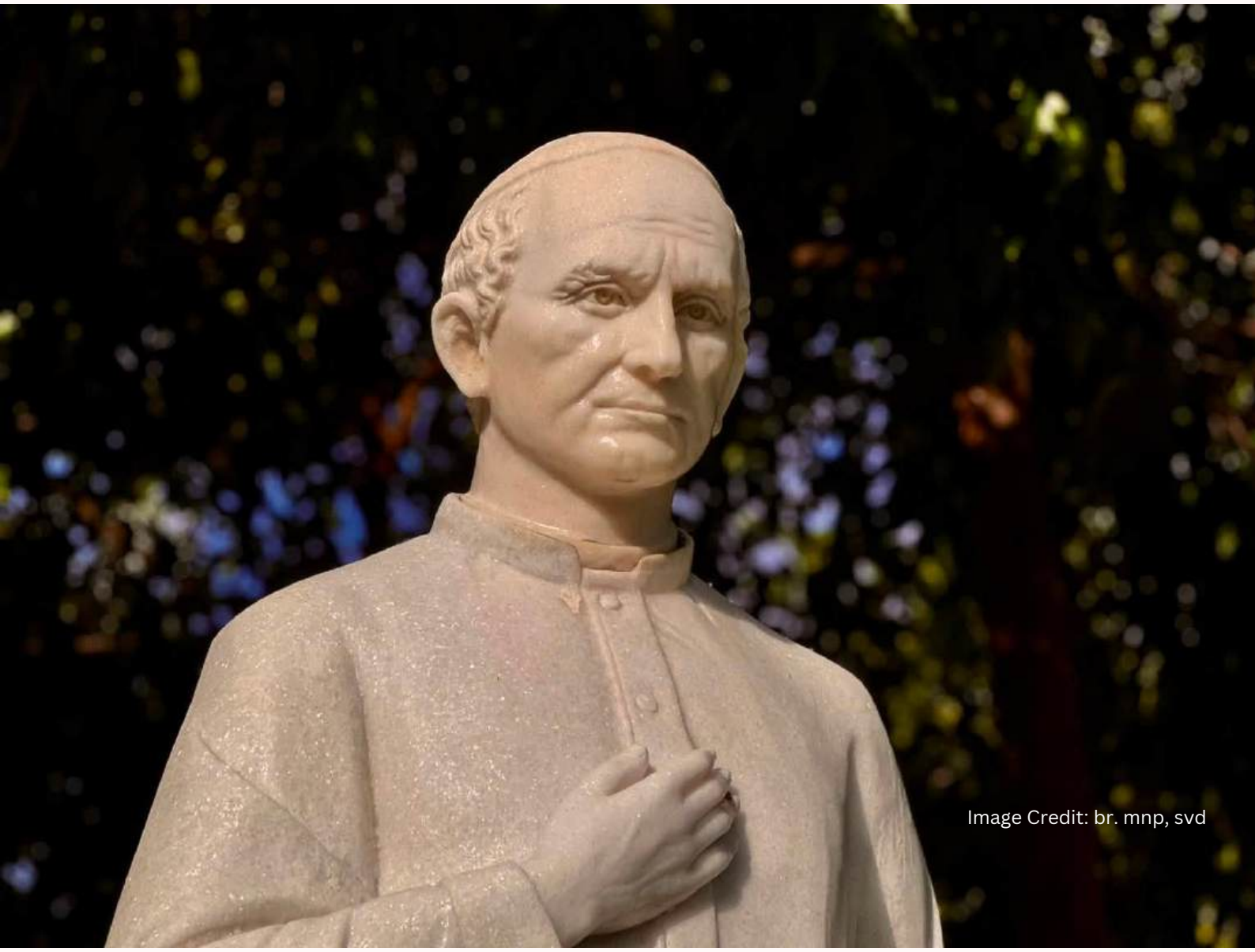


Image Credit: br. mnp, svd

Dear Brothers! In my observation, the distinction between priest and brother is no longer relevant in the SVD. Neither superior nor subordinate are classifications of Jesus. All are servants in the same Missio Dei. We are brothers to one another and for one another! Anyone who still classifies people as superior or inferior is out of touch with the times—at least among Christians and members of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD).

Leadership—not exclusively for priests

Br. Sebastiao Tenorio da Silva | ANG

Image Credit: Canva.com

Here are my thoughtful responses that can be adapted for our communities or SVD discussion: in generally I can't go deeper to our realities but inspired by II AFRAM Brothers Assembly holder in Kenya.

Fostering a synodal culture of shared missionary leadership

We can foster a synodal culture by recognizing that leadership is first and foremost service to the mission and to the people of God, rather than a privilege attached to clerical status. We can foster a synodal culture by recognizing that leadership is first and foremost service to the mission and to the people of God, rather than a privilege attached to clerical status. This requires creating a community where every confrere, regardless of being a priest or Brother, is listened to and valued for his gifts, experience, competence, and vocation.

Decision-making should involve genuine consultation, dialogue, collaboration, and transparency. Leadership responsibilities should be entrusted to those who are best equipped for a particular task, while providing the necessary formation and support. In this way, Brothers can take leadership roles according to their competence and vocation, while priests and Brothers work together as equal missionary partners. Such an approach strengthens communion, shared responsibility, and the credibility of our missionary witness.

How SVD Brothers can inspire a spirit-filled work ethic?

In our communities and countries, SVD Brothers can inspire others through humble, disciplined, competent, and joyful service. Their witness can show that missionary work is not limited to preaching or sacramental ministry but also includes education, health care, agriculture, technical work, administration, social development, communication, and many other forms of service.

A Brother who approaches his work with prayer, professionalism, integrity, perseverance, and concern for the poor becomes a living example of the Gospel. Brothers can also inspire young people by sharing their skills and mentoring others. Most importantly, their work should flow from a deep spiritual life: prayer and contemplation should give meaning and direction to their professional service. When people see that our work is done not merely as a job but as a vocation and service to God and humanity, it can inspire a similar spirit in others.

Educational and professional preparation needed for young Brothers

Young Brothers assigned to our mission area would benefit from both solid academic formation and practical professional skills. The specific preparation would depend on the needs of the mission, but useful areas could include education and teaching, health care, agriculture, information technology, accounting and administration, construction and technical skills, social work, communication, or development studies.

They should also receive preparation in interculturality, local languages, pastoral work, community development, safeguarding, and basic knowledge of the country's social and cultural realities. Since missionary conditions can sometimes involve limited resources, a Brother should be adaptable, practical, creative, and willing to learn from local people.

Above all, professional competence should be accompanied by strong spiritual, human, and missionary formation. A young Brother needs the ability to work collaboratively with priests, Brothers, religious women, lay people, and local communities. This combination of competence, flexibility, spirituality, and cultural sensitivity would enable him to serve effectively.

Brothers discerning leadership as part of their missionary vocation

Confreres should view Brothers who discern leadership positions positively, provided that their motivation is service to the mission rather than personal status or power. Leadership should not be considered something reserved exclusively for priests. A Brother with the necessary gifts, experience, competence, maturity, and vocation can make a valuable contribution through leadership.

At the same time, Brothers who accept leadership should remain rooted in their religious vocation and in the spirit of collaboration. Their leadership should promote communion rather than competition between priests and Brothers. When confreres recognize leadership as a form of missionary service, the Society can make better use of the diverse gifts God has given to its members. We are in the same boat and word in the mission of God.

Ultimately, the question should not be whether a person is a priest or a Brother, but whether he has the gifts, formation, discernment, and missionary spirit needed to serve the community and its mission effectively. Because the Holy Spirit is always there to fulfil the graces of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, the beloved Son.

A HIGH LEVEL OF TRUST IN BROTHERS

Br. Marselinus Hane | TLE

I belong to the Timor Leste SVD Region. I study my Master's in Educational Managementin Malang State University, Indonesia. Here are my reflections to the guide questions.

How can we foster a synodal culture in which leadership is understood not as a matter of status or clerical authority, but as a shared missionary service entrusted to those whose gifts, competencies, and vocation are best suited to serve the community and its mission?

In my reflection, the first way to foster a synodal culture is by developing a deeper awareness of the meaning of the Sacrament of Baptism. Through Baptism, every Catholic has the same dignity, rights, and responsibilities to proclaim the Gospel according to his or her capacity and vocation. When this awareness of Baptism becomes firmly rooted, it can form people who are more attentive and receptive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Image Credit: br. mnp, svd

This awareness should lead us to recognize that each person has different gifts and charisms. Consequently, leaders should be chosen not merely because of their position or status, but because their charisms, gifts, competencies, and vocation are appropriate to the needs of the community and its mission.

A second way of fostering a synodal culture is by understanding and recognizing that the clergy are shepherds, not rulers. There is a need to deepen and renew our understanding of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Priests are called to be servants who bring people together, nurture communion, and cultivate the diverse charisms of the faithful. They are not the sole owners or holders of authority over the mission of the Church. Rather, they are called to accompany, empower, and coordinate the gifts and participation of all the baptized in carrying out the Church's mission.

In your community or country, in what ways can an SVD Brother inspire others to develop a work ethic that is filled with the Spirit?

After six years of serving in the mission in Timor-Leste, a predominantly Catholic country, I have observed that one of the strengths of the people of Timor-Leste is their perseverance and their strong faith in Divine power, expressed through various devotional practices.

Nevertheless, the people have a limited understanding of the vocation and role of a Brother. They are more familiar with priests and sisters than with Brothers. Therefore, I always strive to demonstrate the way of life of an SVD Brother among the people I encounter, hoping that my life and service may become a source of inspiration.

At present, I am serving in a school while also working as its treasurer. In this capacity, I always strive to teach to the best of my ability and to serve the parents, teachers, and employees with love and dedication. Every day, I begin my work with the celebration of Mass and personal prayer. Thus, when I teach, I do not only impart knowledge but also encourage and guide the students to develop good moral values and character.

Image Credit: br. mnp, svd

I also make every effort to maintain good communication with the parents of the students. I remain sensitive to the needs of teachers and employees, especially when they experience difficulties in their personal lives. Finally, I actively participate in the life of the parish community, particularly by joining the faithful in singing during Church celebrations.

Through these simple acts of service, I hope to show that the vocation of an SVD Brother is a life of faith, dedication, service, compassion, and joyful participation in the mission of the Church.

If a young Brother were assigned to your mission territory, what educational background or professional preparation would he need in order to serve effectively in the particular context of your country?

In the context of the SVD mission in the Region of Timor-Leste, there are several areas of ministry that are particularly needed, including education, finance, mechanical and technical skills, agriculture, and animal husbandry. However, the areas that are most urgently needed are education and finance.

How do your confreres in your community perceive Brothers—whether in your own province or in other zones—who consider leadership positions as an expression of their vocation and missionary commitment?

From what I have observed in the SVD Region of Timor-Leste, the confreres have a relatively high level of trust in Brothers, including in positions of leadership. This may be because the membership of the SVD Region of Timor-Leste is still relatively small, giving Brothers opportunities to assume leadership responsibilities, such as serving as members of the Regional Council, chairpersons of foundations, and regional rectors.

However, there are sometimes reservations on the part of the leadership regarding some Brothers who do not sufficiently demonstrate professionalism in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. At times, they are assigned to tasks that are not aligned with their educational background or field of academic specialization.

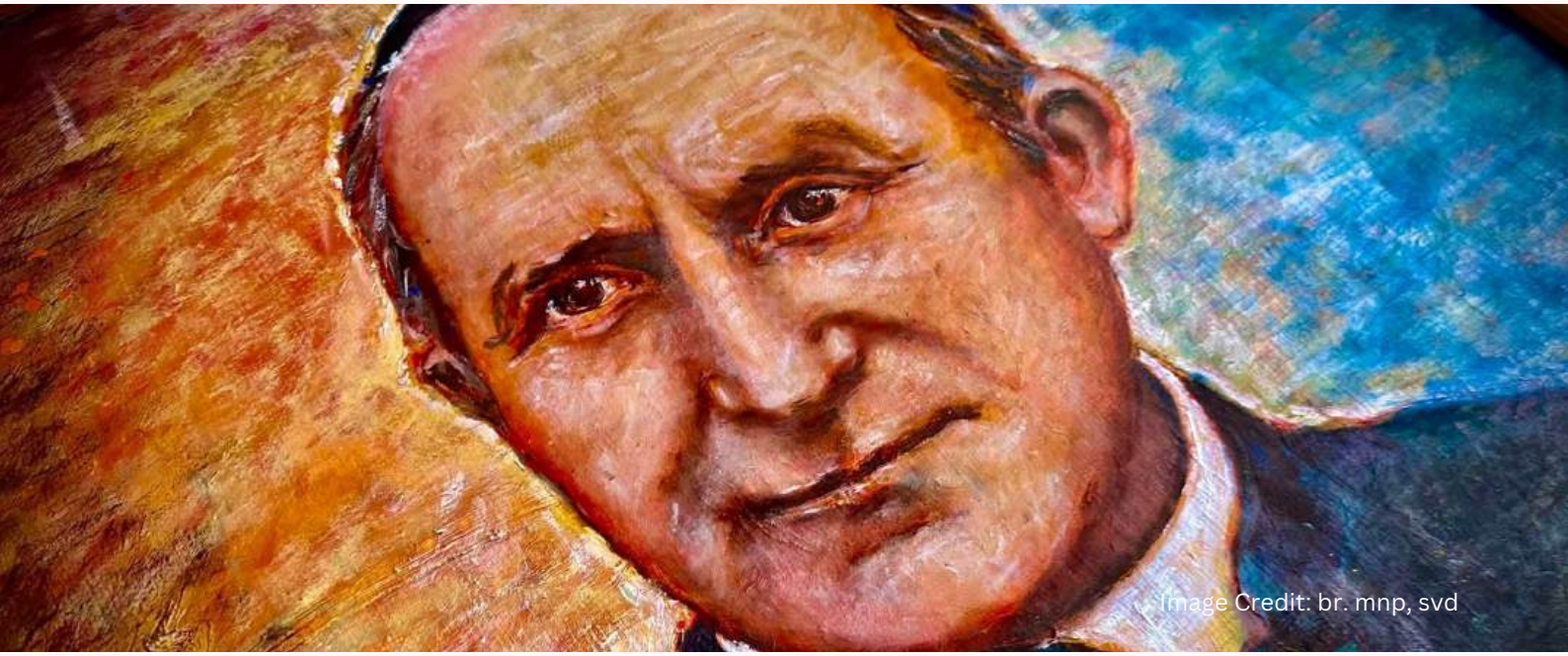


Image Credit: br. mnp, svd

BROTHERS: IDENTITY AND MISSION CONTINUE

Br. Paul Kearns | IBP

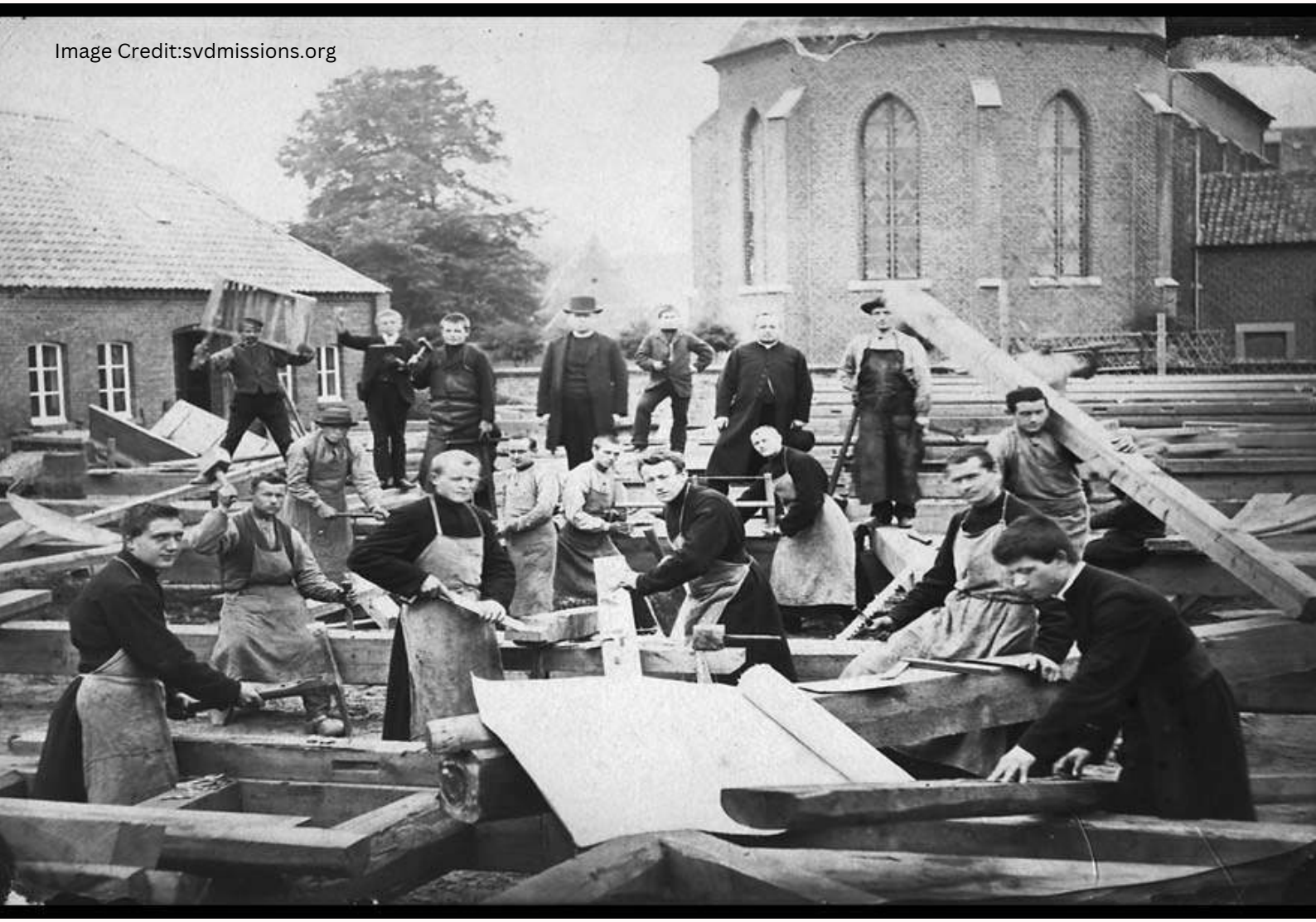


Image Credit:svdmissions.org

Before going further into your questions I want to draw attention to something back in the history of the Society that has been overlooked. Fritz Bornemann in his Biography "Arnold Janssen Founder of Three Missionary Congregations (1837-1909)" writes a letter to Pope Leo XIII the Founder asking. "In our new constitutions may we combine the rules of both the Dominican and the Franciscan Third Orders? The merging of the two would give us, from St. Dominic, the virtues of the teacher and scholar, and from St. Francis, humility, poverty, patience, love until death. That of St. Dominic seems better suited for Priests, that of St. Francis for Brothers. A combination of both rules seems to be a good solution for us." (23 April 1883).

The founder did not carry on with this way but it does show that he had a strong devotion for St. Dominic and St. Francis both of whom had a missionary vocation. There is no mention of these two saints in our SVD Prayers. Instead we have three priests Sts Gregory, Augustine and Vincent. How this came about I have no idea. I myself would prefer Dominic and Francis with his song of brotherhood. Instead of thinking of the Church as essentially a hierarchical society it can also be thought of as a brotherhood / sisterhood.

In my community here in London there are five of us and I'm the only Brother. In Ireland there is just one older Brother as I'm aware of and he is now retired. I have been working in Papua New Guinea were there were more active Brothers. However the Brother's vocation is weakened. This seems to be the case in most countries were we work. As it stands here there are no British or Irish vocations for the Priesthood or Brotherhood. The Priesthood in the Society seems to survive with priests from other countries ready to work in parishes. We have two parishes in England.

Image Credit: br. mnp, svd

I myself am recovering from a hip operation. I was managing to work in my trade in PNG and felt that I was useful there. It looks to me as if the time of the SVD Brotherhood is over here and may be of the Irish/British priesthood also. Young Brothers could be assigned here from countries were they exist however they would find it difficult to find work here.

A SHORTISH FORUM—THE EDITOR'S REMARK

Br. Béla Lányi | PHS

Image Credit: br. mnp, svd

What we are reading here, is one of the shortest Forum's of our almost 20 years of history. I thought that much more contributions will reach us since leadership is an important concern not only in companies or schools but in our Society, too. Are there principles to prepare the next generation of SVD leaders? This is all the more surprising since, in our communities, one cannot help but overhear frequent conversations trying to figure out why this or that confrere was appointed to a particular office. Or was he adequately prepared for the office to which he was appointed? So many questions…

LAST WORDS FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Confereres

Peace!

The Publisher and the contributors of the Forum thank you for reading these reflections attentively. As we journey through this season of preparation for the celebration of Christmas, we wish you a blessed Advent filled with hope, peace, joy, and love. May the coming of Christ renew your hearts and homes, and may the light of the Savior bring you abundant blessings this Christmas and throughout the New Year.

If you would like to react to some sharing or send your own thoughts, you are most welcome. You may use English, Spanish, Bahasa Indonesia, German or Polish in your feedback.

In the Divine Word
The Editors

Image Credit: canva