

**PROVINCE OF EUROPE
PRECAPITULAR ASSEMBLY FOR THE CHAPTER 2022
SYNTHESIS OF THE REPLIES TO THE QUESTIONS
OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL**

IDENTITY AND CHARISM (1 & 2):

Spreading the good news is our main mission and is best achieved at parish level.

The connection between evangelisation, JPIC and Dialogue/Encounter needs to be maintained. We are invited to promote modern ways of evangelization and remain close to the people, especially to Muslims.

Inculturation and integration into African societies

Evangelisation includes inculturation and integration into African societies. Young confreres need to be given the time and means to learn the language and customs of the people to whom they are sent. Further studies should be made in these subjects.

Internationality

Internationality is a rich legacy we need to preserve. It is to be promoted as soon as possible for those in formation. This will help them become open to other cultures. Insistence should be made on the need to learn the two languages of the Society and the local language of their missionary insertion.

In Europe, internationality is less evident, except in the new foundations. However, most confreres would like to see more of it, even in the retirement homes.

At times of elections for major superiors and delegates, we must resist the formation of small national or ethnic groups, which is incompatible with our charism. Only the confreres residing at that time in the province should vote for the provincial team. Provincials do not need to be nationals of the country.

Sharing our charism with the laity

As in the past, we need to work with lay people, but we do not seek formalization. Sectors or Provinces need to be left free to find their own ways.

In Europe, where we have few parishes and institutions, we are distant from lay people. However, many lay people are involved in the running of our houses and certain sector and provincial services.

Elsewhere, catechists and other co-workers are greatly involved in our mission.

SPIRITUALITY (3):

Without a strong spiritual base, any pastoral activity lacks solidity and credibility and will not bear fruit. As Pope Francis says, we must keep a loving attention to the other in everything we do or say.

Spiritual life evolves with the advancement of age. For many years it would be more dependent on prayer in the community. As one gets older, spiritual life is more interior and personal, although it does not lose its need for regular community celebrations.

Unfortunately, these days there is a lack of specialised people in spiritual animation, able to give retreats, recollections, formation etc...

COMMUNITY LIFE (4 & 5):

There is a lack of stability in communities.

In Africa, the best confreres for animating a local community are taken for other responsibilities or further formation. We must remain faithful to the rule of 3 and to the custom of a confrere staying 6 years in his first appointment.

In Europe, there is more stability due to the health of the confreres, but good animation is missing in our houses for the elderly. They insist on the importance of the community project, of visits from the provincial team and from confreres and stagiaires. Formation sessions relevant to community life could be organised through webinars if necessary. We encourage exchanges between houses for the elderly and formation houses by letters and emails.

Problem of stability in the new European Projects

Lockdown had a negative effect on the growth of the new communities which were just starting and which were going well.

There needs to be a real dialogue with confreres before they are appointed to these communities in order to ensure that they are able to adapt to the project and the life of the community. These communities need to give much attention to their community life and the well-being of the confreres.

CONFRERES (6, 7 & 8) :

Lockdown triggered in some confreres a crisis that is difficult for a community to manage: physical and/or psychological suffering, and withdrawal. Isolation has sometimes had unexpected consequences.

Confrères in difficulty:

It would certainly be good to prepare some confrères to help tackle the problems we cannot manage but we will also have to enlist the help of organisations and specialists in cases where we do not see the solution.

More attention needs to be given to candidates in formation when they need help to deal with some major problems. Written reports on candidates in formation must be truthful.

A confrère in difficulty should be given the help he needs as soon as possible; before it becomes too serious. He should never be appointed elsewhere without prior warning to the provincial and community of appointment. Discretion and sincerity are clearly necessary.

It is a great advantage when one can share his experiences with his community, with much discretion and sincerity, and also speak of things that are not going well in the community itself.

Elderly Confreres:

With the decrease in numbers of available personnel those who are of retirement age are pressed into service.

We need some confrères who are trained in the skills of care of the elderly to take charge of retirement communities. Otherwise, we can turn to professional careers. Training sessions for the superiors of retirement communities are fine, as long as the facilitator starts from the needs of the participants.

It is time for the provinces of Africa to prepare their means of caring for the elderly.

We hope to keep the confrères who are sick and old, as long as possible, in our communities. We do what we can to avoid a situation where a confrère feels rejected when he has to move to a care home.

Some wonder if there is not another model than the current one of grouping all elderly confreres in the same (intergenerational) place.

The MISSION (9, 10 & 11):

In Europe our mission is to be a bridge between Europe and Africa and present the positive values of the African peoples, cultures and Church. We are called to be present and to be witnesses to the simple way of life in solidarity with others.

In Europe, the majority of confrères are elderly. They find it difficult to think of a mission “ad extra” today. There is a kind of frustration and powerlessness to find our place in the world where other organizations are so efficient, as well as in view of our age-fragility and limitations.

In order to live our mission, we need to develop our use of modern social media. (Refer to the paragraph on Media).

It is time to strengthen our existing missionary commitments and to encourage new initiatives and find young and competent confrères to staff them.

Any new insertion needs to be directed at the peripheries: prisons, refugees, etc.. *“If the other parishes do the same as you, what merit is there? »*

We encourage charismatic and prophetic individual confreres and wish to discern better if their work can be incorporated within the mission of the province or the sector. The community dimension is to be assured so that their support and continuity is guaranteed.

We can encourage the reception in our community houses of people in illegal situations, until their case is decided. This should be done with prior consultation of the community involved. Encourage confreres to join in social events e.g. demonstrations for climate change, migrants. Enter into a more active dialogue with Muslim communities.

LAUDATO SI (12)

Because of their age, confreres may support the L S Action Plan, but are unable to participate actively.

We would like to see the Christian approach to ecology stressed, with our responsibility before God. Our respect and stewardship of creation includes the respect of our fellow human beings. The abuse scandal is an aberration in this respect.

We can highlight the elements of Laudato Si in a simple style of life (food, dress, gardening). We cannot wait. Let us act **NOW**. Each community is asked to revise its way of living according to the Action Plan.

EVANGELISATION (13, 14 & 15)

Let us have the courage to leave a well-established parish, handing it over to the local diocesan clergy, so as to seek another place of mission. Instead of solid foundations in Africa, why not dare to found new communities in Europe, also in need of mission? Here, there are many Africans in the big cities. Maybe it is time to « cross the water » in both directions? Wherever we go, we offer our missionary service to the local ordinary.

Refugee centres, there are in plenty. But is it possible to visit them given the insecurity? One can only visit them on occasions and, where possible, in community or attached to a parish. It

is the same for a foundation in the slums of some of the big cities. It must always happen in relation to a parish decision. Only working in development or in social work is the work of the NGOs.

We ask ourselves if we should still be in Mexico, or Brazil or elsewhere. We only went there with the intention of missionary and vocation animation and the response has been negligible.

The Media

Our own publications are tired, due mostly to the lack of personnel. We need to find other means of communication.

In the current situation in Europe, the social media has become the first means of missionary and vocation animation everywhere. It is therefore good to modernize and make our websites more attractive. We should not hesitate to call on full-time professionals, especially for the website in Rome.

In our retirement communities we could encourage the use of media and inputs which open the minds of confreres to world events and local problems. Videoconferencing is the most effective and economical system of continuing formation and communication. Organised courses on modern means of communication at community or sector level would be a great help for confreres.

There is here a new field of the apostolate, especially prayer in the area of internet, media and publications. Why not transmit live the retreats by videoconference to our communities for the retired?

ENCOUNTER – DIALOGUE – ECUMENISM (16)

There is a negative presentation of Muslims by the media which mainly gives an Islamist terrorist image.

We could help people to know the difference between the Muslims and terrorists by giving a positive witness on our living together with Muslims by talks in the dioceses, schools, private circles...

We are called to get to know Muslims and their families on a very local level in the neighbourhood.

We meet difficulties in our relationships with some new churches and movements, where there is strong opposition to the Catholic Church. However, with leaders and congregations of the mainstream churches and faiths, interreligious and ecumenical encounter is possible.

FINANCES (17, 18 & 19)

If confreres need financial help for projects or emergencies they should direct their request to the Solidarity Fund and not to individual provinces or confreres. It is therefore good to inform the confreres of the possibility of presenting projects to the Solidarity Fund and the procedures to present a project.

We encourage the formation of a team at the level of the Society who know how to draw up projects and supervise them.

We should stress from the beginning of formation that candidates should look for financial support from their own families.

Some provinces have started income generating projects, but it needs 10 years or more to recover the investment. We should explore the possibility of fundraising in parishes in Africa for the Society especially for formation.

No individual confrere should start his own private individual project. It should always be a community project approved by the Province/Sector.

Confreres should remember that all salaries for teaching, stipends, or for pastoral work should be handed over to the community (See C&L).

In case of mismanagement of finances, civil law could give us some guidelines about how to handle the situation.

The prerequisites for confreres chosen for formation as bursars should include, common sense, an ethical conscience, honesty and the intellectual capacity to follow the programme. Training should be started in Formation Communities.

Regular auditing should be done at all levels of the Society and associated projects.

GOVERNMENT (20, 21, 22 & 23)

Positive effects of the European Province

It was a good move to create the European Province. It already helps when there are not enough people in a sector to run it. This is a good preparation for the future of all the sectors.

There is always the danger of being too enclosed in our little worlds. The Mega Province has helped us to avoid this. It has widened interests and concerns.

Negative effects

It has been difficult in Europe to form the mega province and have the sense that we belong to the province and not just the sector. Many think of *my* sector instead of *our* province. We have to think of our Society as a whole.

It is difficult to know one another, difficult to visit. Some complain that they don't see the Provincial enough.

Some confreres feel that appointments to a sector are made at a distance because they are filtered through the Province.

Proposals

A number of confrères would like a regular visit from the Provincial Team at least once a year, despite the size of the province, and that each community be visited at least once during the Teams' mandate.

The Provincial team could give a spiritual input when they visit. This could help create a spirit of belonging to the province if the same topic is given everywhere. Maybe even Sector Superiors can do the same for other sectors.

Regularly evaluate the Provincial missionary commitments in order to improve them or close them.

Make the whole society aware of the Provincial Projects, both what we are doing and what we need. It would help to get people for them in the future.

The number of General Assistants should remain at 4, without distinction of nationality.

For the smaller sectors, the delegate can be involved in activities other than administration, such as pastoral commitments, or the media. He should also show concern for the sick

confreres. The larger sectors make more demands on the time of the delegate, as do the large communities on their superiors. This increases the need to renew the personnel in these services and to prepare confrères who are arriving from Africa. We suggest that we give more responsibility to lay people in the administration of the sectors.

At provincial level we should keep the present number in the provincial team: Provincial, assistant and treasurer.

Missionary and vocation animation in Europe

We are still doing something. It is a dream to think that getting some European vocations will maintain the international character of the Society.

Other congregations in Europe are unable to attract vocations despite the number of their members appointed to missionary and vocation animation. The decline in faith in our countries greatly hinders animation, and a lifelong commitment to mission in Africa no longer attracts young Europeans. We are aware, however, that some traditionalist congregations do attract young vocations.

Most of our elderly confrères can no longer commit themselves to vocation animation. Some confrères are actually against the recruitment of young people for our mission in Europe.

The problem of a potential European candidate is his initial formation.

Young confrères from other provinces, who already have a good experience of mission and who are willing, could be appointed to Europe. They should have a period of formation in local culture and language, and the character of the Church, and upon their arrival and be made aware of the issues of secularism in some countries.

We should be creative.

We could help young volunteers to go to Africa to visit our parishes and projects.

In places where missionary animation is still taking place in parishes and schools we should continue to do it. Stagiaires can help in all this.

Our communities need to be a place of welcome for young people. We hope that our pastoral activities and our lives give witness to our missionary identity.

FORMATION (24, 25 & 26)

The « stage » is fundamental to our formation. It's the key to our formation in the culture and language of the people to whom we are sent. A successful stage will affect the rest of a candidate's missionary life.

Learning a language is very important. We must take the learning of the language and the adaptation of the stagiaire to the peoples' culture very seriously.

He must be well prepared to face the country he will find. Everything must be done to ensure that the stagiaire is helped to cope with the administrative procedures upon his arrival.

It is not good practice when a confrere is appointed to a country totally different to that in which he made his stage, and where he invested himself in learning the language.

The progress report of a stagiaire is important as it gives some indication to the welcoming community of how best to welcome him and accompany him. There is a balance to be reached between discretion and what the welcoming community needs to know of the report by his previous formators.

Wishes for Formation: our formation process must be above all missionary and open to the brother's vocation. The brothers' formation must be adapted to their needs.

As well as the usual further formation courses on which confreres are sent, some should be trained as psychologists specially to ensure the necessary expertise in integrity of ministry in the provinces. We insist that students be sent to a wide range of institutions, to have a greater experience and knowledge.

We cannot have experts in everything and so should know how to consult professionals where necessary.