



A Description of the Xaverian Charism Preamble

(A preamble that captures a general description of the charism for Brothers, Associates, Collaborators)

We, Xaverian Brothers, associates, and collaborators are a true religious family, striving to fulfill the spiritual aspirations that Theodore James Ryken had for his Congregation.¹ Following the path of our Founder, we are called to live ordinary lives that give witness to God's unconditional love. We believe that the Xaverian calling is a way of being put in our place in the world,² a place of humility and simplicity, from which we receive the grace to turn toward God, fall in love with God, and put ourselves in God's service as followers of Jesus Christ.³ Within each distinctive life choice, we are further invited to attentiveness, simplicity, flexibility and openness to the common, unspectacular flow of everyday life.⁴ We unite ourselves to God through an integrated life of both contemplation and service.⁵ Through the Xaverian Way we are awakened by the Spirit of God to our own graced potential and freely offer that giftedness in service to the gospel. Through our ministry, in particular among the poor and the marginalized, we work to help others discover their own uniqueness so they, too, may "share the love of God with the world through their own giftedness."⁶ In a spirit of hospitality, we try our utmost to be approachable and available, as true brothers and sisters who welcome others and accompany them in the joys and sorrows of their lives.

A Description of the Charism as Lived by Xaverian Associates

As Xaverian Associates we believe God is inviting us into the life of the Xaverian Brothers and we choose to accept the invitation to embrace the Xaverian Way. The spirit of the Xaverian charism animates our own vocations through following the ordinary way as exemplified by the founder, Theodore James Ryken.⁷ Through our vocation as Associates, we thereby extend the gospel values and diverse ministries of the Brothers through our ecclesial commitment as baptized Christians with the integration of the Xaverian Way into our universal call to holiness.

We endeavor to respond to and embrace Theodore James Ryken's challenge to be formed by the "common, ordinary, unspectacular flow of everyday life" and recognize that becoming an Associate enlivens our desire to be a part of the Xaverian community and embrace its values which otherwise would be inaccessible to us.

As Associates we accept the Xaverian call with a different expression, yet with the same commitment to its charism, spirituality and values as the Brothers.

We believe that our life of gospel witness, lived individually, with families, neighborhoods and workplaces, is an answer to the call of the Holy Spirit. We are called together with the Xaverian Brothers to share, promote and extend this gift of the Holy Spirit through three commitments:

1. Daily Prayer
2. Outreach to the poor and marginalized
3. Communion with the Xaverian Brothers

As each Associate hears the call of the charism in his or her daily life, prayer forms and the movement toward contemplation will vary. Our uniqueness calls us to pray as we can and we embrace prayer as a conscious communal reflective practice found in the lives of both Mary and Martha. It is with sincerity of heart that we aspire to emulate Mary as we choose the “better part” by turning toward and falling in love with God.

We recognize a prayer life without movement outward toward involvement with the poor and marginalized can become sterile,⁸ therefore we commit to ministerial involvement. We embrace Ryken’s vision to “mutually help, encourage, and edify one another” and work together. Like Martha, we are impelled to place ourselves in humble service to others. As Associates we believe the gift we have received we give as gift.

Our association means we accept the Xaverian way and make it part of our lives. In doing so, we express our connection with the Brothers through their history, calling and life experiences. We accept that we are being put in our place to better learn through communion and service.

It is our hope that in communion with the Brothers and through service to the poor and marginalized a mutual and energizing commitment, affirmation and vocation transpire. We feel called, together with the Xaverian Brothers, to share, promote and extend the gift of the Holy Spirit, to work to recognize our ordinariness by acting in harmony with each other and by living with the knowledge that God has placed us here, in our place of holiness, in order to give back that which we have been given.

¹ An allusion to Ryken’s *Apologia* addressed to Bishop Jan Baptist Malou, 1864. CFXGA, 3.5.1.4: “Consequently, what I established in 1839 must remain an authentic religious society.... The spirit that the Xaverian Congregation must have is the Religious spirit. This is the whole community’s calling as intended by the founder for himself and all those who wish to associate with him. Therefore it is and should be the calling for all and nobody should dare to enter the congregation without primarily striving after the same religious spirit....”

² Cf. the working paper on Xaverian Spirituality and the importance of place (ground) for the middle-Dutch mystics. (Working Paper, p. 17 and following). A further explanation of this is found in the Working Paper on Xaverian Life Form (p. 35), in the section on Community.

³ Cf. the revised translation of Ryken’s description of his conversion (Working Paper on Xaverian Spirituality, p. 23 in the English version): “at the age of nineteen, after powerfully being put in my place, I turned toward God, fell in love, and put myself in His service.”

⁴ Cf. Working Paper on Xaverian Spirituality p. 22: “Grounded in the ordinary, a Xaverian Brother is further invited to dispose himself to a life of attentiveness, simplicity and openness to the unspectacular flow of daily life. His way is the ‘ordinary way.’ He is invited to live in gratitude and in awe of all that which typically escapes attention or notice because of its smallness, difference, foreignness, unimportance, brokenness or insignificance. To do so, he must willingly eschew any attitude, behavior or involvement that exalts or promotes superiority, privilege, exclusivity or entitlement. He must be open and hospitable to the unknown and the unexpected, ready to listen, appraise and respond with a spirit of faith, hope and love.”

⁵ Cf. Theodore James Ryken’s *Plan* (ca. 1837-38) “We want to give now our attention to the total picture of this present plan and consider two excellent qualities which will be found in this Congregation and which are considered to be great in the Church, namely the contemplative and active lives. In fact, if it is God’s pleasure to lift our proposed plan to that very height that we intend and of which we hope that it is pleasing to Him, then the members will have the privilege of following both the lives of Martha and Mary.” [Plan, §61-63]

⁶ An allusion to the Fundamental Principles:

It is through your life of gospel witness
lived in community with others
that God desires to manifest
care and compassionate love
to those who are separated and estranged,
not only from their neighbors,
but also from their own uniqueness;
to those who suffer
from want, neglect, and injustice:
the poor, the weak, and the oppressed
of this world.
They too are called
to experience,
express,
and share
the love of God with the world
through their own giftedness.

⁷ Letter from Theodore James Ryken to Mr. G.N. Hermans, 14 November 1844).

⁸ From “Growing Spiritually Through Prayer”, Brother Paul Feeney, C.F.X., 2012.