

A Description of the Xaverian Charism

*(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 Congregation¹. 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 world², 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 the Brothers

<u>ORIGINAL VERSION</u>	<u>REVISED DESCRIPTION</u>
As consecrated laymen, we Xaverians freely choose an "ordinary life" without privilege or entitlement where we seek to find God and be formed by the "common, ordinary, unspectacular flow of everyday life." Motivated by the lofty purpose proposed for the Congregation by our Founder, we set as our life direction the non-dichotomized life of Martha and Mary. ⁷ Like Mary in the presence of Jesus, we choose the "better part" by turning toward and falling in love with God. Like Martha, we are transformed by that love and impelled to place ourselves in humble service to Jesus	As consecrated laymen, we Xaverians freely choose to live without privilege or entitlement and allow ourselves "to be formed by God through the common, ordinary, unspectacular flow of everyday life." ⁹ Motivated by the lofty purpose proposed for the Congregation by our Founder, we set as our life direction the integrated life of Martha and Mary. ¹⁰ Like Mary in the presence of Jesus, we choose the "better part" by turning toward and falling in love with God. Like Martha, we are transformed by that love and impelled to place ourselves in humble service to Jesus through our service to others. ¹¹

through our service to others. ⁸	
We aspire to realize our Founder's vision of "a band of Brothers who mutually help, encourage, and edify one another, and who work together." ¹² We endeavor to integrate prayer and contemplation with growth in friendship within the community by means of honest and fraternal dialogue. We understand that the "way of perfection" our Founder envisioned for us is a way of continual formation. ¹³ This takes place for us in our community life as well as through our individual practices of prayer and contemplation. In community we are encouraged to discover our gifts and talents and to affirm the giftedness of our brothers, calling each other to greater service of the Lord. Here we also find the grace and the support to embrace the ascetical practices of poverty, consecrated celibacy and obedience for the sake of the kingdom. ¹⁴	We aspire to realize our Founder's vision of "a band of Brothers who mutually help, encourage, and edify one another, and who work together." ¹⁵ We endeavor to integrate prayer and contemplation with growth in friendship within the community by means of honest and fraternal dialogue. We understand that the "way of perfection" our Founder envisioned for us is a way of continual formation. ¹⁶ This takes place for us in our community life as well as through our individual practices of prayer and contemplation. In community we are encouraged to discover our gifts and talents and to affirm the giftedness of our brothers, calling each other to greater service of the Lord. Here we find the encouragement and support to embrace a life of asceticism, celibacy, and contemplation that, by the grace of God, strengthens our public commitment to vow for chastity, poverty and obedience. ¹⁷ As a community nourished by the memory of Brothers who have followed this way before us and enriched by a growing intercultural presence, we, together, search out "the needs of the times and the desires of the Lord in (our) regard." ¹⁸
We live in communion with the Roman Catholic Church recognizing that our place in the Church is on the margin, in solidarity and availability among the people, freely renouncing any sense of power or prestige, and witnessing to the ideals of the first gospel community.	We appreciate and embrace the lay nature of our Congregation rooted in the Roman Catholic Church. We often see our place within the Church, however, as being on the margins, in solidarity and availability among the people, freely renouncing any sense of power or prestige, and witnessing to the ideals of the first gospel community.
We are sent as missionaries to the world to	We are sent as missionaries to the world to

participate in the church's mission of evangelization. Like Theodore Ryken, we believe that the best way to bring out the giftedness in an individual is through education, but we realize that education takes many forms. We see our way of life as being intimately connected with our mission. We believe that it is through our life of Gospel witness lived in community that we respond to the Spirit's summons "to manifest God's care and compassionate love to the people of the world in these times."¹⁹ We are called to live our mission on the frontiers, whether those frontiers are on the outskirts of society among the poor and marginalized, or at the center among those who are separated and estranged from their own uniqueness. Impassioned with Spirit-driven apostolic zeal, following the example of our patron Francis Xavier, we stand ready to leave the familiar and the comfortable "to go throughout the world to teach all peoples."

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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 Cf. Working Paper Conclusion, p.93: “Brother Ryken came to an awareness of a life direction for him (and his followers) – the non-dichotomized life of Martha and Mary, the *ghemeyne leven* – and aspired to achieve that lofty purpose. Incarnating that aspiration occurred, however, within the ground of his graced humanity. It was an “ordinary” graced humanity in two ways: (1) self-determined to be without privilege and entitlement, and (2) open to the constant yet quiet irruptions of God in the unspectacular flow of daily life.

⁸ Service for Ryken was not done for humanistic reasons, but rather is understood as done in relation to placing oneself in service to “His Majesty,” thus the importance for the Xaverian Brother to see ministry not simply as service to others, but as flowing from one’s union with God in contemplation. See the Working Paper on Xaverian Spirituality, p.22ff.

⁹ Cf. Fundamental Principles:

If you allow yourself
 to be formed by God
 through the common,
 ordinary,
 unspectacular
 flow of everyday life,
 you will gradually experience
 a liberation and freedom
 never before imagined.

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¹² Cf. Fundamental Principles:

This was the vision
 Theodore James Ryken had in view
 when he founded the congregation:
*A band of Brothers
 who mutually help,
 encourage,
 and edify one another,
 and who work together.*

¹³ Cf. Working Paper on Xaverian Spirituality (p. 25ff) on life in common and Ryken’s understanding of how he wanted the Brothers “*to forcefully work at their own perfection*” as found in *The Plan*, as well as the Working Paper on Xaverian Life Form (p. 32-34): “Ryken and the first brothers insisted upon a consecration that would be perpetual in nature so that they and future members could spend their vowed life in *volmaaktheid en goestelijke oeffeningen* (perfection and spiritual exercise). In Ryken’s vision of Consecration, the brothers would be perpetually vowed for such a life.”

¹⁴ Cf. the discussion of Community and the evangelical counsels in Working Paper on Xaverian Spirituality, p. 35-39. See especially the discussion of the vows on p.39:

The Xaverian expression of the life of the evangelical counsels has always included a consciousness of living ordinary lives in common. Our sense of poverty inspires us to live ordinary lives, appreciative and grateful for the gifts of creation with a consciousness of living with less rather than more so as to share in the prodigality of God’s love: “The gift you have received, give as a gift.” It challenges us to care for the gifts that we hold in common and to carefully confront any movement toward preoccupation with possessiveness and autonomy. Our spirit of consecrated celibacy calls us to live as Brothers to one another in community as well as to all whose lives we touch. This fraternal love invites us to appreciate the fundamental uniqueness of each person and to challenge any movement toward exclusivity, manipulation or possessiveness. It calls us to attend to the lessons that are taught in the experience of solitude and aloneness and to the formative influences that come through the challenges, joys, and sufferings that constitute a life lived in common. The spirit of obedience invites us to listen attentively to the directives that arise in the course of our ordinary, everyday lives – some within our own consciousness; some as a result of our interactions with others; and some that emerge from the situations that we encounter and from the world in which we live. This same spirit of obedience invites us to appraise these directives both individually and communally and to let these appraisals guide us toward decisions and actions that will promote and serve the life and mission of the Congregation. The mission and ministry of the Xaverian Brothers have always been directed toward ordinary people. We continually face the challenge of finding ways to have our life in common (and not so much our talents and resources) be the witness to the Gospel that we offer to those we serve. To live in solidarity and availability among those we serve, we need to live ordinary lives that share in the common elements of life – gifts and limitations, grace-fullness and sinfulness. We need to actually live as Brothers in order to give an authentic witness to those we serve.

¹⁵ Cf. Fundamental Principles:

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¹⁸ Cf. Fundamental Principles

Above all,
enter into an ever deeper sharing
of faith and prayer with your brothers;
reflect with them on how you find Him
in your lived experience.

In this way
the community searches out
the needs of the times
and the desires of the Lord
in their regard.

¹⁹ Cf. Fundamental Principles

²⁰ Cf. Fundamental Principles

Preparation for 27th General Chapter

Personal Reflection on the Description of the Charism

What do you find significant about the Description?

- 1 and 2 paragraph.

We're laymen.

Ordinary life every day with fellow-brothers where we seek to find God. Community is emphasized. It's seen as a grace and support to embrace the three vows we have done.

- The 3th paragraph is putting us in a broader frame, the Church.
- The fourth paragraph is especially about our mission among the people, serving others in far countries and close by, and certainly the fellow-brothers.

They capture the essence of:

- Who we are
 - How/why we do what we do
-

Inclusiveness i.e. – Associates & Collaborators

Spirit of hospitality –

Uniqueness of experience – “poor and marginalized” Life of reflectiveness and service. Growth in friendship –

“Non-dichotomized life”

Pretty much in place – variety of mission experiences

Frontiers? Explain

Poor and marginalized?

I agree with the Charism statement

1. We are called by God and attempt to respond to God's call freely choosing to live “ordinary life” – here we seek to be formed by God – Relates to my experience – finding God in my common ordinary experience – not in “extra ordinary”
2. Experience of being loved – touched me – enables me to share love of Jesus – through service to others – in community ministry and relationships.
3. My experience of our common brotherhood – rooted in community life of lived experience – been for me transforming and challenging.
4. Community Brothers – reorganized in me gifts talents – John K., Jim B., - Xavier – Campus ministry – pastoral Counseling encouraged me to develop my “people gifts” – med Rel, CPE - Harold Boyle invitation to House of affirmation Summer Leadership Program.
5. Life Gospel witnessed lived in community – was attraction to life, asserted me grow in life as a human being. Vowed religious, Best kept secret about our life “hidden” – needs to be seen and shared with others – hospitality – strength, gather through community able to send God's love, care to other in community and to larger community.

-
- “Fall in love with God, and put ourselves in God's service”

To me this is the essence of the Xaverian Life

- “Contemplation and service”

To me, this discerns how we journey toward God.

- “A band of Brothers who mutually help . . .”

To me, emphasizes the priority of community as the best way to live out Ryken’s vision.

Invited to attentiveness, simplicity, flexibility and openness to the common unspectacular flow of everyday life.

Our own graced potential/power . . . Our ministry . . . to help others discover their own uniqueness . . .

Paradigm of Martha/Mary, as reflective of our call to contemplation and service (silent reflection alone and active service to others).

. . . vision of “A band of Brothers”

Reference to Community (lines 3, 6, 7 and paragraph 4, line 5) . . . continual formation . . . and footnote 10

. . . communion with the . . . Roman Catholic Church . . . our place on the margin . . . witnessing to the ideals of the first gospel community.

Participate in the church’s (note: small ‘c’) mission of evangelization.

- “Common ordinary, unspectacular flow of everyday life.” To me this quote is a summary of our lives.
- The importance of individual practices of prayer and contemplation-the focus is on me and the individual Brother.
- I like the way that parts of the Fundamental Principles are interwoven throughout the description of the Charism.
- To live “ordinary” lives: a witness to God’s life and grace acting in our lives. In union with our Brothers, whether individually or communally, we render God’s love to all whom we meet on our journey.”
- Awakened to our own graced potential we help others discover their own uniqueness, to be shared with others. In the spirit of hospitality we expand our effect on this world to build God’s Kingdom. Our effect will be multiplied by all those instructed and influenced by the Xaverian Way.
- Ordinary life, service to others, “lived in community”, in solidarity among the people (what does this mean?)
- “Service to others”-in classrooms, administration? Retired Brothers? (A changing world)
- As our schools become more expensive are we losing contact with the poor? Are we insulated from the poor and marginalized?
- As our larger communities shrink are we becoming more self-reliant and called to an individual prayer life?

....we choose to live an ‘ordinary life, without privilege or entitlement.... this describes the brothers. There is no career advancement in our vocation, no hierarchical steps upon which to climb. This lack of personal ambition enables us to ‘place ourselves in humble service to Jesus and through our service to others.’ This ideal speaks loudly to me.

....”we are called to live our lives on the frontiers.....” This challenges me to live our call by leaving our comfort zones so to enter more directly in solidarity and availability with those who look to our fraternal outreach. The evangelization we express as Xaverian Brothers is found in the quality of our human relationships; sometime we actually preach it, but most of the time it’s in our interactions.

....”our place in the church is on the margin, in solidarity and availability”; this again reinforces our call to reach out, and for me to try to actually live with those in need, “renouncing any sense of power or prestige,” and to live truly AS BROTHERS.

Can you accept the Description?

Yes! Members are laymen and missionaries, sent to the world.

Having a simple life.

Supporting and encouraging one another.

Through the world (international).

Education.

Yes. I believe it has been honed and refined over the past couple of years and pretty well expresses my experience of the Brothers over the years.

Not part of the process –

Charism of x education – no clue –

Are Associates – Collaborators part of the process

My limits – Gemini –

Change of focus from we should, to I will

Xaverian Way?

Not Really.

It's more ideal way we actually live

I accept

It's well written and complete, and reflects the lived lives of the Brothers

Whole idea of Charism is a new perspective of the values we have always held. Chapter prep has to include a serious look at the work of past chapter and an evaluation as well as a realistic structure for the future. The description of Charism is good but it must have a practical outcome.

Yes. It fleshes out the Fundamental Principles in a way that can constantly challenge me to be a better Xaverian Brother.

Yes, I can accept this description. I am particularly pleased with its emphasis on the individual. While we do live as Brothers in a community we still maintain our individuality, our uniqueness.

Yes, I can accept the description in essence. It includes elements that speak of

God's initiative in calling us to live as Brothers.

Ongoing formation in the ordinary flow of life.

Life in community

Life in mission – to serve others – particularly those on the margins.

I accept the description of the Charism because in a very rich way, it captures all the essential elements of our way of life – the Xaverian Way – as it should be lived out by the Brothers today. In accepting the description, I accept all the footnotes, which I consider essential parts of the description.

Yes. It describes well the life style we are currently living.

Yes – especially the observation that

1. Call us to live ordinary lives that give witness to God's unconditional love. Be a brother to my neighbors – I'm not any better than you because I'm a Xaverian Brother.
2. Also – grace turned us toward God, we fell in love with God, etc. –
 - a. All is grace – God's extraordinary love
2. In a spirit of hospitality – we try to be approachable and available to these ties in with #1

I do accept the description. The phrase which serves as a focus of the entire description is: "The Xaverian Way." As a young brother and also in mid-life, I longed for a way or "insights" on as used here "aspirations" for our Xaverian "spirituality." This description very apply contains elements, components of a Xaverian Way, a Xaverian spirituality which is a truly wonderful legacy for our young and not young Brothers for initial and on-going formation.

I can accept the description as long as community life is reorganized in various arrangements and settings i.e. Intentional Groups, which is my primary experience now. I like the inclusion of missions at the center among those separated and estranged from their unique selves.

Ordinary life – Missions - The Fundamental Principles.

Yes! – an outstanding description of our life and ministry as Xaverian Brothers, rooted (radical?) on the past, acknowledging the present and envisioning the future.

- Phrases that resonate with me: ordinary life, Martha and Mary, continual formation, for the sake of the kingdom, on the margin, evangelization, life of Gospel witness.
- Yes, because of the emphasis on the ordinary flow of life's journey. The melding of the contemplative and active, the affirmation of each Brother's gifts and contributions, educating in many forms on our mission and Way.
- Appreciation of emphasis on service (with a mention of influence of change in American culture and the concern of an aging congregation)
- Appreciation of the emphasis on hospitality.

.....yes, I can accept this description; it parallels the Fundamental Principles, the document which has formed and molded our spirituality for many years. The statement reflects the three – pronged call of prayer, community and service; it serves as a good reminder to me of the vocation I have chosen.

Suggestions for editing:

While I can accept this description, I would suggest editing the first paragraph: the verbs used sound like we have already arrived at those lofty aspirations. I think using verbs like HOPE, STRIVE, ATTEMPT ASPIRE, ENDEAVER reflect better the tone and idea the words hope to convey, much like we find in the second paragraph.

Also I believe the articulation of our charism reflects well our historical basis, but I question whether it reflects how we've adapted it to the **present** realities of the 21st century, so as to make it a living and inviting document, one that would make it come more alive to readers outside of the brothers themselves, especially associates, volunteers and potential new members. Can we incorporate somewhere in the final paragraph or so a reflection of how we are responding through this charism in creative ways to the changing needs of the world in which we live, expressed through our commitment and our ministries that address peace and justice issues, environmental concerns, inclusivity of minorities, outreach to the immigrants, emphasis on expanded international missionary outreach, to mention a few?

Eighteen years ago the congregation struggled with the question of being ONE INTERNATIONAL congregation and disbanded provinces. I'd suggest some mention of our desire to live out our internationality needs to be mentioned, again reflecting the living out of our charism in the **present**, perhaps making it a more current reflection of our present day reality.

- a) The invitation to turn toward and falling in love with God, God who, in spite of all our faults and weaknesses, remains turned toward us and calls us to turn toward Him and to enter his service through our obligingness toward our fellow-beings.
- b) The invitation to integrate prayer and contemplation with growth in friendship within the community by means of honest and fraternal dialogue, realizing that such a dialogue is only possible thanks to our commitment to solitude, our faithfulness to our evangelical counsels and our fundamental principles.
- c) The fact that education is the best way to favor the opening out of young people, although it seems highly desirable that this education be done by a group rather than by individuals: the influence of a group is much greater than the one of an individual.

- d) The invitation to answer positively any appeal with regard to educational services anywhere, preferably among poor and marginalized young people and/or those having learning difficulties.

If not, what needs to be added or changed in order for this Description to gain your acceptance?

- a) Replacing some words:

Non-dichotomized life (**a vision of life, where work and prayer are intimately integrated**).

“Falling in love” is **a choice** for the love of God (falling in love was a young experience of love).

Ascetical practices (leave out: **ascetical**).

- b) The text stays vague.

c) Especially paragraph four is vague about mission: We see our way of life as being intimately connected with our mission / education takes many forms / what can it be more? I don't find any further concrete mission dedication in the text who is typical Xaverian Also I myself can't propose an adaptation of the text in that sense.

More involvement in process

Too late to make major changes

We must earn our living, which today is costly.

Preamble – needs to include some mention of living this Xaverian Way in communion and interformation with a “community” of some kind.

Brothers Description – what does it really mean for us today to say we “Live in Community!” when we live so much apart from one another.

I've often wondered why we use “consecrated celibacy” and not “consecrated celibate Chastity?” Just a question.

I don't care for the expression being put in our place. I would choose another word for the word “put”.

In only have a couple of responses – not very significant ones:

For me – the description which follows the Preamble, I think the description reads better if paragraph #2 became paragraph #1, paragraph #1 becomes paragraph #2. I also “wish” the word “harmony” were included somewhere, somehow as our “homage” for our motto. If the new rendition of description of Charism – last paragraph. Part in place – consciousness of my relationship and God.

Emphasis on place – turning toward - common, ordinary, unspectacular all worked in Humility – the very ground of a spiritual life.

Non-dichotomized life of Mary and Martha – or at ease & prayer & formation.

We are both – guests and servants among poor and marginalized – kind of

Suggested Addenda –

1. An expanded reference to “community life” which includes the increasing number of vowed members not living in a community residence. Related to this, some reference to the involvement of such Brothers in our common, unspectacular flow of everyday life such as finances (page 1, line 8). This might include an expansion of our lives as a Band of Brothers’ (page 2, line 8). This may we emphasize our lives as a ‘community circle’ as opposed to a

hierarchical model where decisions and actions flow from above with limited input from those affected by such actions.

2. "Church's mission of evangelization" (page 2, paragraph 4). Perhaps replace (or expand) the term, evangelization with a reference to Kingdom. From my reading, kingdom refers not to the hereafter, i.e. the kingdom of heaven, but to a 'reign' or state of humanity on earth of justice, peace, compassion and inclusivity (O'Murchu et al). A more current 21st century word rather than the old 'evangelize, i.e. convert to Christianity, ransom pagan babies in China!

3. On page 2, paragraph 3, expand the notion of 'liminality/margin' describe more WHAT the 'ideals of the first gospel community' were (as opposed to the way these "ideals" are practiced in the current hierarchical Church (note upper case C!). Any reference to the latter is unnecessary; simply a reference to the three passages in Acts of the Apostles (2:42, 4:32, 5:12).

- No. 1. Is "being put in our place" what the Xaverian vocation means? Our Fundamental Principles state:

Brother,
You have freely chosen to respond
to the call of God, your Father,
to live a life of love
in faith and trust
as a disciple of his son, Jesus Christ,
in the Congregation of the
Brothers of Saint Francis Xavier.

To be put in one's place doesn't seem to me to adequately express the sense of vocation we find in these lines. As to being put in his place, Ryken was referring to his conversion experience at age nineteen, not to his vocation as a religious.

2. Through the Xaverian Way we are awakened to the Spirit of God in our own graced potential and freely offer that giftedness in service to the gospel. What is meant by the Xaverian Way? Where is it found in Ryken's writings? Is it meant to imply a special Xaverian spirituality? If so, I don't believe there is any basis for this. Historically we have not seen ourselves as recipients of a special spirituality bequeathed to us by Ryken. What I believe we can state is that the Founder's approach to the spiritual life was eclectic.

3. We live in communion with the Roman Catholic Church, recognizing that our place in the Church is on the margin. I believe we live in communion with the whole Church, not one segment of it.

4. I do not believe that the "best" way to bring out the giftedness of an individual is through education, but can also be done in other ways. I do believe, however, that education is one way to bring forth an individual's giftedness.

- What does the Xaverian "Way" mean?
- At this stage, I don't think I am "ready to leave the familiar."
- Drop/change the word "non-dichotomized" in reference to Martha and Mary.
- Many Brothers are involved with the disabled, so this word should be added.
- There should be a stronger emphasis on our life of poverty.
- What is meant by the word community? This also includes forming or joining a local community for those living away from other Brothers.
- A big problem for me is that it is too long. The description of the charism cannot cover everything.
- Meaning of "put in one's place"? Meaning of the "Xaverian Way"?

I accept the description of the Xaverian charism, because it stresses very clearly:

- a) the requirements of our personal lives as religious;
- b) the requirements and the importance of religious community life, so that each community member can fully open out and practice forgetfulness of self;
- c) the importance of our apostolate among poor young people anywhere, an activity based on and inspired by God's love.

TWO REMARKS:

- a) It would be a pity if the interest and the efforts stirred up by the description of the Xaverian charism would lead to the forgetting of our fundamental principles which offer so many concrete stimulants concerning our way of life as religious, as members of a community and as 'missionaries'.
- b) Given the fact that the number of brothers no longer able to be 'active' does nothing but grow, it may seem desirable to add to the description of the Xaverian charism a paragraph wherein the elder, sick or handicapped brothers be encouraged to continue playing an active role within the Congregation especially thanks to a growing amount of time devoted to prayer and adoration.

Community & Spirituality

Below are the Brothers' responses from the first phase of the pre-chapter reflections. After reflecting on the Description of the Charism, the Brothers were asked to think about and discern what practices or exercises could be adopted by all members of the Congregation in order for us to live more deeply and intentionally the Charism of the Congregation. Here the suggested practices from the Brothers are grouped according to specific statements from the Description that gave rise to each suggested practice. You will see that certain themes are repeated. We did not want to combine similar practices in this document, but rather allow the Brothers to see all that was suggested, and thus see some common themes. The Working Committees for the General Chapter will further refine these practices based on feedback received from the Brothers individually, or from community/area gatherings.

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SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

"We endeavor to integrate prayer and contemplation with growth in friendship within the community by means of honest and fraternal dialogue."

Suggested Practices:

1. (Background for my suggested practice: Before offering my first suggestion about things we can incorporate related to this, I will mention some things about intentional groups which might be replicated in other ways. Right now there are still several Intentional Groups which gather several times a year. The group I meet with does intentionally endeavor to do what the sentence above says. Everybody who comes understands that this is the purpose of these gatherings and comes away feeling somewhat refreshed and rejuvenated. From what I have heard from members of the several other Intentional Groups, this is what happens with them also. Donna Markham in her retreat talk to members of the 26th General Chapter, mentioned that "if there ever were a time when religious men and women were needed to counter the pervasive pull toward further shattering relationships and fracturing communities, it is now." I believe our Intentional Groups strive, however imperfectly, to do many of the things she recommended that we must do in our communities if we are going to be inspired to be that witness of peace so needed in today's violent world. Our Intentional Group is quite a hodge podge of people with varying interests, attitudes, spiritualities, but we do enjoy being together, and we strive, however imperfectly, to live up to what Donna Markham says in her talk:

" Establishing a relationship of mutual respect frees us to manage our differences. This means that we acknowledge we do not possess the whole truth of a situation and that we have something to learn from someone else...In listening with openness to the opposing other, we begin to learn how perspectives have been formulated and what experiences lay beneath a given position...."

Practice: Ask all the Brothers to nominate any Brothers they think are "conveners", people who are well equipped with a welcoming, inclusive personality and have the

ability to invite and gather once a month the several Brothers in his community, or several Brothers in separate residences, for an afternoon of socializing, 'catching up with one another', and sharing how they are living out their lives as Xaverian Brothers. The tenor of these gatherings (where they fall on the spectrum from formality to informality) would be determined by the group.

This is already being done to some extent, but it would be good to set it up more intentionally...

These Brothers, plus any that leadership invites to be a "convener", would meet to come up with 'best practices' for convening and be commissioned to be conveners in a prayerful ceremony.

There should be at least one such group which would include a couple of Congolese, Kenyan and Anglo Brothers that would meet twice a year.

2. Discern how to live the Xaverian Way for today's circumstances. Each Brother's living situation and spiritual place.
3. Figure out what God is calling us to as a Congregation?
4. Each Brother has a community or group which he is identified that meets regularly for dialog and prayer revive intentional groups.
5. Being quiet together in prayer
6. Providing a half-day of reflection and decision-making on the threshold of a new school-year in order to fix the division of the tasks within the community and to establish an order of the day which each community member recognizes as realistic and promises to respect it to the best of his ability.
7. Organizing every two months a community meeting during which an honest and fraternal dialogue evaluates (assesses) both the respect of the order of the day and the fraternal love within the community and where is also examined whether sobriety is sufficiently practiced, especially during Advent and Lent.
8. A member of a brother's close family may be seriously afflicted and confronted with costs he can't bear! If asked for some help and after having seriously considered the problem himself and being mindful of his vow of poverty, the brother is invited to inform his superior/director in all honesty so that the latter can judge of the opportunity of a community meeting which examines what the community possibly can do to help a bit the afflicted family.
9. Kind and helpful to outsiders

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

"In community we are encouraged to discover our gifts and talents and to affirm the giftedness of our brothers, calling each other to greater service of the Lord."

"...our place in the Church is on the margin, in solidarity and availability among the people, freely renouncing any sense of power or prestige, and witnessing the ideals of the first gospel community"

Suggested Practices:

1. The aforementioned suggestion about "conveners" of groups could be a great help in making it more intentional for these things to happen. Perhaps one of these groups, a group of retired Brothers could decide to live in a poor urban or rural area, having a ministry of presence, living lives of witness, and helping neighbors however they can.
2. Weekly community meetings for Brothers in physical communities, more encouragement of, and support for, intentional groups for others.
3. Meet regularly to prayerfully discuss and evaluate this concept

4. Gather at least one a month for honest, fraternal exchange about our life together as XB's and our attempts to live out the Fundamental Principles.
5. Gather weekly for a reflective sharing on the Sunday readings and how they impact our individual and community lives.
6. Brothers throughout the Congregation ought to plan occasional simple days of prayer and contemplation for all members & Associates in the U.S. in the spirit of ongoing formation. The day would center on a dialogue pertaining to an appropriate spirited resources which may enhance our non – church organized living exemplified by the lives of both Mary and Martha.
7. Communities and groups meet bi-monthly to study Scripture and to reflect on their shared lives.
8. Communities and groups arrange for bi-monthly celebrations, meals or activities in which to share their fraternity, recognizing the need to include Brothers living alone, Brothers in other communities, Associates and other appropriate persons.
9. Suggest the formation of several new intentional groups
10. Getting together often in order to be “brothers” to each other.
11. Deepening our spirituality together through gatherings and meetings
12. For Brothers living alone – make a sincere effort to be part of the meetings of Associates and Brothers for prayer – meals – discussions.
13. Also, from time to time, Brothers who are living alone could and should come together for a sharing of prayer, communication, meals.
14. There seems to be a need for examining and sharing ideas on what “community” means
15. Times to share and celebrate Brothers for what they do and who they are.
16. Since we see Africa as the growing area of the congregation, and its real future, can we initiate a program that would prepare future leaders-community builders, from Kenya and Congo? Perhaps they could come to the USA for professional training and lived experience. Perhaps several ‘formational’ men from the states could facilitate an extended leadership program, both in Africa and in the states, in spiritual-personal formation for a selected group of future African leaders.

Specific statement:

We set as our life-direction the integrated life of Martha and Mary.

Suggested practices:

1. Respect for quiet in some rooms of the community: Silence, as the way in which we listen to God's presence in our midst and open ourselves to his guidance, is an indispensable element in a healthy community. Silence then is the place of communal obedience. (I especially think of our formation houses).
2. Reading a short passage of the Xaverian charism or of the Fundamental Principles before going to bed and meditate on it the next day during mass, meditation and visits to the Eucharist, so that we regularly get invited to turn ourselves toward God, God who is constantly turned toward us and willing to talk to us. Regular visits to the Holy Sacrament and ejaculatory prayers are excellent means to remain conscious of God's presence and of the meaningfulness and the deep sense of our work.
3. Organization of a recollection every three months and of an annual retreat.

Specific statement:

Continual formation takes place for us in our community as well as throughout individual practices of prayer and contemplation

Suggested practices:

1. By organizing prayer services for the community at the occasion of special feast or occasions. Bi-weekly lecture from the Fundamental Principles or from the Constitutions.
2. From each brother can be expected to take responsibility to give ear to the needs he sees in the community.
3. This can be implemented by the following practice: At least every other year the General Administration should attempt to provide a retreat opportunity for the Brothers who wish to come together for such a purpose.
4. Convene 'area' meetings on a regular basis; or sponsor a retreat weekend for brothers in a particular area.
5. Try to promote the purchase of community houses and encourage Brothers to live together in actual communities.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

"A band of Brothers who work together . . ."

Suggested practices:

1. Primacy of living in community
2. Specifically Xaverian apostolates, especially to the poor and marginalized.

Specific statement:

In a spirit of hospitality, we try our utmost to be approachable – etc.

Suggested practices:

1. Hospitality embraces both joy and sorrow. We Brothers in the U.S. & in other regions need to reflect together on prayerful, liturgical and communal way of gathering which demonstrates true fraternal experiences when celebratory events like Jubilees as well as sorrowful events when we mourn the passing of our Brothers in new life.
2. Invite Associates/Collaborators to join "cluster" groups – so as to honor and affirm lay ministry

Specific statement:

"Recognizing our place in the church is on the margins"

"To participate in the church's mission of evangelization"

Suggested practices:

1. Help to sponsor and attend conferences/meetings/organizations that support non hierachal models of church, i.e. call to action.
2. Stress in workshops, conferences, etc. that evangelization is more freedom of the spirit within us, not "salvation" or "members" in the church.
3. Being active in our local parishes I believe is a real challenge for many Xaverians. That would include worship, volunteering for committees and/or parish outreach programs, like ESL, parish council, faith formation groups, etc. Our academic and personal experiences over the years could add significantly to the life of a parish. Also a practice would be subscribing/reading to Catholic periodicals, keeping informed on latest news and developments in the church.

Specific statement:

Be formed by the common ordinary unspectacular flow of everyday life.

Suggested practice:

1. Continue asking Xaverians to prepare prayers and reflections on scriptures, Fundamental Principles and everyday experiences – make these available on “Living the Charism” web page.
2. Create an “examination of consciousness” based on “The Xaverian Way.”

Specific statement:

“We believe that the Xaverian calling is a way of being put in our place in the world...from which we receive the grace to ... fall in love with God....”

Suggested practices

1. Recognizing his need to nurture his love relationship with God, each Brother will seek out such appropriate resources as spiritual direction, days of recollection, retreat, faith sharing groups, lectures and course work to supplement his daily/regular prayer life.
2. Help one another find our place.
3. Another practice in spirituality I could envision is a periodic communication of suggested books the brothers could read to keep current. The experience and talents of many of our brothers could be tapped to inspire and encourage growth in spiritual reading : Peter Fitzpatrick, Paul Feeney, John Hamilton, Cornelius Hubbuch, Regj Cruz, to name only a few.
4. Part of each Brother’s daily prayer will include an examen of the quality of his fraternal presence to his Brothers and to all those whom God sends into his life.

Finance

(Including the call to simplicity of life, the practice of evangelical poverty, and self-sustainability.)

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SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

“As consecrated laymen, we Xaverians freely choose an “ordinary life” without privilege or entitlement where we seek to find God and be formed by the ‘common, ordinary, unspectacular flow of everyday life.’”

Suggested Practices:

1. The groups gathered by “conveners” could be a good way of helping us Brothers to strengthen that “honest and fraternal dialogue” which would be a great help to us as we look at how simple our life really is, and truly answer the call to live simply.
 - a. Have area meetings in the near future which would have somebody as engaging as Fr. John Donahue, SJ, to help us get ready to more intentionally get involved in groups like those mentioned in my first suggestion. Many writers on the religious life have said that the way we live our vow of poverty is foundational. At the area meetings with John Donahue several years ago, a number of Brothers made commitments to live more simply and to somehow strive to make the world a more just place. The conveners and groups described in my first suggestion would have been a great support for Brothers to live up to such commitments.
 - b. We've received much information on our financial situation, but it would be good for us to find ways to help one another and challenge one another to live in ways that do such things as distinguish wants from needs and act responsibly in light of our income and our witness to others.
 - c. We need to have small group gatherings of Kenyan and Congolese Brothers with at least some of our Anglo Brothers to have an honest and fraternal dialogue about the financial future of the Congregation in all areas of the world and what we are all called to do in light of this
2. Live simply
3. Every community meet twice a year to discern specific ways that as individuals and a community they can live more simply and better honor the vow of poverty.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

A band of Brothers who mutually help encourage . . .

Suggested practice:

1. Membership should be kept informed in advance of changes being discussed in relation to financial matters (disposal of property) and be asked for input

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

Our place is on the margin . . . renouncing power and prestige . . .

Suggested practices:

1. Promote ways in which dependence on Congregation financially is more apparent . . . Brothers not act as if they were financially independent . . . e.g. making financial donations.
2. Whenever possible living together rather than separately.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

Witnessing to the ideals of the first gospel community

Suggested practices:

1. That the general administration attempt to provide housing in certain geographic areas for those Brothers who wish to live in a community (of say, four) rather than to live separately – alone.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

We believe that it is through our life of Gospel witness lived in community that we respond to the summons to the spirit, etc

Suggested practices:

1. Even in aging, we Americans & Belgian Brothers can still manifest “God’s care and compassionate love to peoples of the world,” by remaining conscious of the need of our missions. Once a year, the Brothers will meet with Leadership in order to receive updates on our African, Haitian and Bolivian Missions, along with and discerning prayerful, financial & technological ways each Brother or community may contribute to the well being of some aspect of mission needs.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

In community we are encouraged to discover our gifts and talents and to affirm the gift of our brothers calling each to greater service of the Lord. Here we also find grace and support to embrace ascetical practice of poverty, consecrated celibacy and obedience for the sake of the Kingdom.

Suggested practices:

1. Encourage Brothers to live with other Brothers to share expenses.
2. Brothers live among the people whom they serve – (poor and marginalized) – of the ministry
3. Strive constantly to live as simply as possible. If living alone, look for bargains, etc., so that one can live within one’s means. Plus, plan some monies to help out those less fortunate – example: Haitians.
4. Be more aware of how my use of Congregation’s resources affect the Brothers.
5. Develop a better system for accountability.
6. Define the practices of poverty for each region of the Congregation.
7. Each community and region entities gathers at least once during the course of the year to examine prayerfully the individual and community practice of poverty and simplicity including consideration of Style of life. Common ownership, discipline and accountability to community.

8. Naturally a balance has to be visible in many things between our ordinary lifestyle and the witness of it to people.
9. African sustainability is an outstanding need of the Congregation at this time. We have in the USA several men who excel in this domain, and who have directed our Congregation through major financial crisis.
 - a. Can both African regions select a promising brother who would receive the proper training and creativity to address this issue on their local levels? Perhaps these two brothers could come to the USA for proper training, and share in the Congregational finance committee to learn new skills through academic training as well as through fraternal and practical 'osmosis'.
10. Given the financial situation of the Congregation and the work of the Finance Committee in creating a long-range financial plan, can the Chapter adapt a funding policy for new initiatives where the Congregation, because of its very limited financial resources, is not seen as the initial source of funding for mission expansion, capital needs, operating expenses (beyond initial formation)? To help us do this regionally, can each region of the Congregation have someone serve as a coordinator for development – so that this person becomes responsible for grant-writing, research of possible funders, coordinating requests for support? The regional coordinator for development would need to work in collaboration with someone from General Administration so that regions are not competing against each other for funding.
11. In order to address desire for self-sustainability, especially in our regions in DRC, Kenya, and Haiti, can learn from the example of other Congregations and develop other sources of revenue

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

Participation in the Church's mission by believing that education is the best way for that, but at the same time to realized that education takes many forms

Suggested practices:

1. Taking care to and giving a perspective to street children. (Remarque: When these children are staying at a center, than two brothers have to be with them because too much free time, too much money, drinking...).
2. Giving witness of fraternity as a volunteer or as a cooperator in education help.
3. Being active at the industry-world and fitting oneself to be on an evangelical disposition, active at the social life because we have to take care for the financial future of our communities for, by an accelerated changing and thinning out of the Congregation's ranks, the financial assistance will stop within perhaps a decade.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

Suggested practices:

1. I think the present situation is quite good.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

OUR PLACE IN THE CHURCH IS ON THE MARGIN, IN SOLIDARITY AND AVAILABILITY AMONG THE PEOPLE

Suggested practices:

1. Ascetical practices of poverty;
2. A life of solidarity
3. Spirit of initiative.

INTRODUCTION:

- a) Nowadays the Congolese region counts 17 perpetually professed brothers; four of them are abroad. Among the thirteen brothers residing in the Congo, one is pensioned, two are fulltime implicated in formation work and three are still studying. Consequently there are only seven perpetually professed brothers who have a job... which is totally or partially (poorly) paid.
- b) The Congolese region counts actually 15 temporary professed brothers; five of them are abroad. Among the ten remaining brothers residing in the Congo, seven of them are still studying and only three have a job totally or partially paid.

CONCLUSIONS :

The only income of the brothers in the Congo is derisory (although there are some other revenues coming from house rents, transmitting aerials, a cybercafé, a bookshop) and excludes self-supporting for many more years. Yet this situation should not discourage us but push us to reflect, to pray, to judge and TO ACT.

Let us start with sobriety:

- Could we, should we live more soberly in a milieu where most people are poor, very poor?
- Could we moderate the consumption of beer? Is consumption of beer in the novitiate desirable, just as mobile phones?
- Could novices and postulants farm some land and grow maize for instance?
- The summer holidays of our brothers-students often last at least three months.

Couldn't they, during this period, keep in repair (painting for instance) our community houses?

- Could we explore in Kasenga the possibilities of growing cereals and breeding small cattle?
- Could the communities in Likasi till some land at the Kampemba farm in collaboration with our street-kids at Ryken house, or should we envisage the sale of that farm instead of paying (I hope my pieces of information are still exact) of paying two workmen for the maintenance of the farm?
- Let us hope that the exploitation of the festive hall will be remunerative within two years!
- Do we need a general councillor for Africa, if there is a general councillor living in the Congo and a general councillor living in Kenya.... and if our General Superior manages to spend more time in Africa?

General and Regional Level Governances

Below are the Brothers' responses from the first phase of the pre-chapter reflections. After reflecting on the Description of the Charism, the Brothers were asked to think about and discern what practices or exercises could be adopted by all members of the Congregation in order for us to live more deeply and intentionally the Charism of the Congregation. Here the suggested practices from the Brothers are grouped according to specific statements from the Description that gave rise to each suggested practice. You will see that certain themes are repeated. We did not want to combine similar practices in this document, but rather allow the Brothers to see all that was suggested, and thus see some common themes. The Working Committees for the General Chapter will further refine these practices based on feedback received from the Brothers individually, or from community/area gatherings.

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SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

We believe that the Xaverian calling is a way of being put in our place in the world , a place of humility and simplicity from which we receive the grace to turn toward God, etc.

Suggested practices:

1. We believe God's loving presence surrounds our "place" as Brothers in the world and beckons us to fall in love, to serve others as followers of Christ. Since presence to God and each other is a way in which God never ceases to mediate his gracious love, we believe that not only our communities but also our Leadership needs to be a presence and among us not only through fractional or technological communication. This being so, we believe that over the course of six years, our Brother General ought to visit each Xaverian Community and also have a private meeting with each Brother.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

We aspire to realize our Founder's vision of "a band of Brothers who mutually help, encourage, and edify one another, and who work together."

Suggested Practices:

1. At this time we need a General Superior who has a good idea of all the areas of governance, but who is helped by competent persons in legal, finance, and school sponsorship areas, and who is willing to delegate most everything to them. While he has a general awareness of what they are doing, he gives them authority to carry out policies while he spends most of his energy and time in pastoral care throughout the Congregation. The primary thing he will be doing will be to work with the "conveners" mentioned in my first suggestion, and helping the Brothers throughout the world to engage in fraternal and honest dialogue about their spirituality, how they live their lives as Xaverian Brothers, the financial situation of our Congregation, and their needs, hopes, aspirations,

- and responsibilities. He should have staff assistants in doing this work, which, in reality, will be a horizontal style of governance rather than a top down system.
2. It is time to re-think the congregation of governance and to involve more of the Brothers in planning and decision making.
 3. Brothers in leadership positions strive to be alert to possible areas in which individual or groups of Brothers may be able to provide assistance or presence.
 4. Brothers in leadership positions will call members to activities of service or presence according to the gifts of each, including the ministry of prayer for those no longer capable of more physical activity.
 5. More area meetings which have a consultative, not merely educational function
 6. Revitalize area coordinators who would be the “face” of the GS and would begin again the practice of area meetings.
 7. Leadership should periodically solicit input from membership regarding governance structure and practices
 8. That Brothers in the various regions gather at least once a year for fraternal sharing to one another. A portion on the fraternal time be spent in prayerful reflection of way in which we can mutually help, encourage and edify one another and reflect on these issues which seem to be surfacing in the region.
 9. Evaluate present leadership model
 10. Support new leadership to be more collaborative
 11. Because of the communication with the Brothers in Belgium (and Congo?) it should be practical that the general superior would speak French. It's also acceptable a general councilor should be practical that the general superior would speak French. It's also acceptable a general councilor should speak French, a person in which the brothers have confidence.
 12. Better communication from the General Council so that we know what they are discussing and what kinds of decisions are being made which affect our lives and ministries.
 13. I would hope that an evaluation will be made of ways in which decisions made them were and were not implemented to avoid the same mistakes this time.
 14. More contact with general and regional governances.
 15. That at least once every three years of his 6 year term, the General Superior visit each community and each Brother living along to foster fraternal relationships, to assess the spiritual and ministerial life of each Brother, and to encourage each member personally to continue steadfast fidelity to the Xaverian Way.
 16. Have the up-coming chapter delegates begin an evaluation of the new governmental structure we adapted in Baltimore three chapters ago. Then expand that evaluation process to the entire congregation, thus empowering and reaching out to the entire membership. Strengths and weakness of our present governmental structures would surface; adaptations and modifications would be suggested.
 17. To show the importance of Africa have VG reside in Africa with broad authority for decision-making.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

In community we are encouraged to discover our gifts and talents . . . calling each other to greater service of the Lord.

Suggested practice:

1. Try to promote general/regional governances that are less institutional and more pastoral and personal.

2. Continue using electronic/internet resources for communication and contact but also try to provide physical contact/meeting when possible.
3. Talk about how we see leadership's role in the Congregation. What do we want from Leadership?
4. Distinguish between leadership and management.
5. Brothers in leadership positions strive to get to know each of the Brothers personally by private conversations at least yearly.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

We live in Communion with the RCC Recognizing our place in the church is on the margin solidarity and availability.

Suggested practices:

1. Continue to support the expanded roles of women in the church – speaking out in support of women's issues.
2. We need full time General Superior and Vicar General – and both visit the Brothers pastorally
3. Collaborate with other congregations of Brothers to find our place in church structure.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

Participation at the Church's mission by believing that education is the best way for that.

Suggested Practices:

1. Perhaps only our engagement to go on with Christian inspired education is not longer a clear future for congregations, because lay people and the State are taking over. They do that with definite directives and concrete programs. Because of that the congregation has to adapt and to look for answers on new states of emergency which present them in some areas where brothers are present.
2. Even if in Belgium nor in America there isn't any growth of the congregation, a refoundation can happen in other countries: Congo, Kenya, perhaps Haiti. God can grant the charism to young African brothers to start to encourage one another to a growing service to the Lord and to participate on this way on the Church's mission.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

"Impassioned by the Spirit-driven apostolic zeal, following the example of our patron Francis Xavier, we stand ready to leave the familiar and comfortable...."

Suggested practices:

1. Initiate a "mission coordinator" position on the generalate team, perhaps "a counselor for mission" in the general council whose responsibilities would include active outreach to the brothers (volunteers, associates, etc) who minister outside of the States. Connection, congregational outreach, support would all be part of his responsibilities.
2. Initiate 'regional coordinators' in the States, brothers who would assist in the animation, gathering, chapter follow-up of the men in the different geographical

areas. One man on the generalate staff could coordinate all the regional coordinators periodically.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR GENERAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL LEADERSHIP:

1) AT THE GENERAL LEVEL :

When looking at the composition of our Congregation (nothing but old brothers in Belgium, quickly aging brothers in the States and mostly younger brothers in Africa), I wonder whether the division of the responsibilities of the General Superior and his councillors should not be reconsidered, in order that the General Superior be able to devote much more time in the African regions (three times a month) where, in close collaboration with the regional and local leaders, he exercises his leadership chiefly by studying, guiding, animating and encouraging each brother, each community, each responsible and each group of local and regional leaders, so that all of them look in the same direction according to the description of the Xaverian charism.

Moreover the financial administration requires a regular follow-up... Being loved makes the moral life possible.

2. AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL IN AFRICA :

Given the problems which raised over the previous years in connection with the regional leadership, I believe that the following suggestions might be worth examining. As far as the future is concerned I am in favor of a regional council (nothing else) composed of a chairman and four members.

a) What about the chairman? I see two possibilities :

- The Congolese brother who is elected as general councillor also becomes, with the consent of the General Superior and his Council, the regional leader.
- The General Superior consults the membership of the region. How? He asks all professed brothers having at least three years of vows to send in the names of three perpetually professed brothers who would make good leaders and, with the consent of his council, he appoints one of the three brothers for a term of three years, after having consulted the brother in question.

b) What about the four council members?

- As the numbers of the perpetually professed brothers and the temporary professed brothers are almost the same, I would suggest that two perpetually professed brothers and two temporary professed brothers, having been under vows for at least three years, be elected as regional councillors. How?
- Preferably under the leadership of the General Superior or of his delegate all professed brothers meet and a separate ballot is organized for each councillor. To be elected a brother must get an absolute majority of the cast votes. The brother who was elected first (a perpetually professed brother) becomes the chairman's vicar and will assume his duties when the latter is absent or unable to act.

c) SECOND POSSIBILITY :

The local superiors of the active communities become the regional councillors and, among them, they appoint the chairman's vicar.

d) REGIONAL COUNCIL MEETINGS :

My suggestion would be that the dates of the regional council meetings (a meeting every five weeks the agenda of which is known and published in due time) be fixed at the beginning of the school-year. If the councillors have been selected, every third meeting is immediately followed by a second gathering also attended by the local superiors. This last group can judge whether or when a general assembly is desirable.

NOTE : It is obvious that each community or each individual brother, preferably supported by his community, can introduce an agenda item.

e) As far as THE REGIONAL TREASURER is concerned, this appointment should best be done by the General Superior and his council, after consultation of the regional leader.

3. AT THE LOCAL LEVEL IN AFRICA (suggestion) :

Once the composition of a community is known, the brothers of this community, with the consent of the General Superior and his Council, and after having discussed about what they expect from their leader, elect their local leader who must obtain an absolute majority of votes to be elected. This election must be confirmed by the General Superior before the brother elected can assume his office. The brothers also elect the local leader's assistant who assumes the local leader's duties when the latter is absent or unable to act. The regional leader and his assistant act when there is an urgent decision to be taken. But normally the community assembles once a month to discuss the interests of the community and its works.

RECOMMENDATION FROM GENERAL COUNCIL FOR CONSIDERATION BY GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE:

The Council recommends to the Congregational and Regional Government Committee that we have General Councilors for the U.S., Congo, and Kenya. There should also continue to be a General Councilor for Formation.

Ministry at all stages of life

Below are the Brothers' responses from the first phase of the pre-chapter reflections. After reflecting on the Description of the Charism, the Brothers were asked to think about and discern what practices or exercises could be adopted by all members of the Congregation in order for us to live more deeply and intentionally the Charism of the Congregation. Here the suggested practices from the Brothers are grouped according to specific statements from the Description that gave rise to each suggested practice. You will see that certain themes are repeated. We did not want to combine similar practices in this document, but rather allow the Brothers to see all that was suggested, and thus see some common themes. The Working Committees for the General Chapter will further refine these practices based on feedback received from the Brothers individually, or from community/area gatherings.

At this stage of the process, you are invited to reflect on this material both individually and in community or area gatherings. Please identify what practices you support, or make suggestions as to any additional practices you think should be considered. Please send group summaries or individual responses to Stephanie Stricker at the Generalate by 15 June 2013. (Sstricker@xaverianbrothers.org). Chapter Delegates have been encouraged to help organize gatherings, if possible.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

“We believe that it is through our life of Gospel witness lived in community that we respond the Spirit’s summons ‘to manifest God’s care and compassionate love to people of the world in these times.’”

Suggested Practices:

1. There seems to have been such a good response to the workshops run by Jane Thibodeau for our older men....Articles and books by people like Jane Thibodeau would be good reflection material for some of the “convenings” mentioned in my first proposal.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

We see our way of life as being intimately connected to our mission.

Suggested Practices:

1. Every brother will have to look to balance his obligations at the community and his ministry in or out of the community.
2. Interest from the members of the community in ministries of their fellow-brothers can be an encouragement for them.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

“Like Martha, we are transformed by that love and compelled to place impelled to ourselves in humble service to Jesus through our service to others.”

Suggested practice:

1. Regional gathers of Brothers to occur annually and one of which would deal with “ministry” – our ministry to one another in community and with the congregation and our ministry to the large world via our corporate and individual ministries.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

Like Martha we . . . place ourselves in humble service to Jesus through our service to others

Suggested practices:

Periodically meet with Brothers and Associates to prayerfully discuss and examine how we carry this out.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

Sent as missionaries to the world

Suggested practices:

Find ways to be missionaries here at home

Specific statement:

“Gospel witness lived in Community. . .”

Suggested practices:

Live in actual communities or meet regularly to share in one another’s formation and frequently.

Specific statement:

We are called to live our mission on the frontier, whether those frontiers are on the outskirts of society among . . . etc.

Suggested practices:

1. Brothers listed in the Xaveriana are listed by their ministry – (avoid term retired)
2. Encourage Brothers to seek out ministry options regardless of income earned.

Specific statement:

We are called to live our mission on the frontiers, etc.

Suggested practices:

Clarify the distinction between work and ministry. Continue to identify a Xaverian way of ministry.

As we get older and older, we can still be involved in ministry with our own Brothers, friends and Associates.

Retired Brothers continue to minister to others in their area who are in need of help and assistance. Example: Brothers living in senior housing or in the Brother’s retirement houses can find ample opportunity to help others less fortunate.

Specific statement:

We are sent as missionaries to the world to participate in the church’s mission of evangelization.”

Suggested practices:

1. That the General Superior and/or his assistants, during their annual visitation, encourage each Brother to think of concrete, doable ways to engage in missionary activities, even though he may be retired, infirm or incapacitated.
2. Need to find ways of helping the US Brothers feel more aware of and part of the ministry in Africa, Haiti, Bolivia. The video interviews with the Kenyan Postulants is a good start.
3. Also, are there ways in which the African Brothers can become more aware of our sponsored schools, for example?
4. Teach all peoples

5. Leave the familiar and comfortable
6. As we get older and older, we can still be involved in ministry with our own Brothers, friends and Associates.
7. Retired Brothers continue to minister to others in their area who are in need of help and assistance. Example: Brothers living in senior housing or in the Brother's retirement houses can find ample opportunity to help others less fortunate.

Specific statement:

Last sentence – we stand ready

Suggested practices:

1. Ready to give witness to all
2. Embrace the practices of poverty, celibacy, and obedience.

Specific statement:

“Evangelization”

Suggested practices:

1. Offer and share ideas on specific ways each Brother can evangelize

Specific statement:

We place ourselves in humble service to Jesus through service to others

Suggested practices:

1. Discern with community what God is calling one to.

Specific statement:

Religious never are really retired. Their ministry changes and on this way their busy activities prevent them to give to God the most important place.

Suggested practices:

We have to find time and to look for another way of life with God in prayer, in gratitude for our life and for the congregation's life. But besides that not to forget the fellowmen and be more consciously together with our fellow-brothers, also in prayer.

Specific statement:

Suggested Practices:

1. Be more intentional that our ministries (esp. in Kenya and Haiti) are more “Xaverian” ministries than simply ministries of the individual Brothers involved (and will vanish when the latter move on).

Specific statement:

In community we are encouraged to discover talents

Suggested practices:

1. Try new ministries

Specific statement:

“Poor and marginalized”

Suggested practice:

Each Brother who is able commit to 2 hours a week in direct service to the economically poor and marginalized

Specific statement:

We are sent as missionaries

Suggested practice:

1. Promote a better sense of being “missioned” by and for the Congregation.

Specific statement:

But we realize that education takes many forms.

Suggested practices:

1. To make concrete what the mission of the congregation means; to settle what many forms of education means, also in the perspective of the education of our young brothers.

Specific statement:

“our place in the Church is on the margins, in solidarity and availability among the people.”

Suggested practices:

1. In order to practice responsible awareness of current human needs, according to their personal abilities Brothers at all stages of life will take advantage of reading, attendance at lectures and other available resources.
2. As much as possible, Brothers will use letter-writing and technology as ways to advocate for the needs of their sisters and brothers of all races and beliefs.
3. Prayer will be considered as another form of advocacy.

Specific statement:

“we see our way of life as being intimately connected with our mission.”

Suggested practice:

1. At least twice a year, each community or group of Brothers will meet to discern the nature and quality of their hospitable sharing with others of their communal lives.

Specific statement:

“it is through our life of Gospel witness lived in community that we respond to the Spirit’s summons ‘to manifest God’s care and compassionate love to the people of the world in these times’.”

Suggested practices:

1. Part of each Brother’s daily prayer will include an examination of the quality of his fraternal presence to his Brothers and to all those whom God sends into his life.

Specific statement:

“we are called to live our mission on the frontiers...and stand ready to leave the familiar and the comfortable to go throughout the world to teach all peoples.”

Suggested practice:

1. Periodically feature a brother's ministerial outreach in the generalate bulletin or some other communication---interview with Chris Irr, for example. We could begin with the three Xaverians who live in Virginia who are all in their 80's, yet live the aspirations of the congregation in their outreach to the poor and marginalized/the environment/peace and justice. They could serve as great models. The brothers on Beechfield in Baltimore could be a second group featured, and the brothers in our retirement centers who continue to utilize their giftedness in service to others. Brothers in Belgium who also minister in their retired years could also serve as great inspiration to the entire congregation. Spread the word....
2. Could a retired brother or two volunteer for a short time to minister at the new trade school connected with the orphanage in Hinche, Haiti? The contribution could be reinforcing math and/or English skills, as well as computer literacy. Details would be available in the fall of 2013 as the school develops its curriculum and needs in greater detail.

Specific statement:

WE BELIEVE THAT THE BEST WAY TO BRING OUT THE GIFTEDNESS IN AN INDIVIDUAL IS THROUGH EDUCATION

Suggested practices

1. Let us make great efforts in order that all religious lessons in our two secondary schools in the Congo be given by brothers, which, it goes without saying, does not exclude that our brothers teach other subjects too.

Specific statement:

LIKE MArTHA, WE ARE TRANSFORMED BY THAT LOVE AND IMPELLED TO PLACE OURSELVES IN HUMBLE SERVICE TO JESUS THROUGH OUR SERVICE TO OTHERS

Suggested practices

1. That some brothers in the Congo, next to their congregational and professional charges, be, once a week, efficient members of one or other live ecclesiastical community! In this way they bear witness to God's Church among us and contribute, in an enriching and encouraging way, to the formation of lay-people.
2. If time allows it, it would be worthwhile if some brothers cooperated on vocational and pastoral committees and organized holiday-camps. These are ideal moments in order to have a considerable influence upon the human and spiritual growth of young people.

Xaverian Associates

Below are the Brothers' responses from the first phase of the pre-chapter reflections. After reflecting on the Description of the Charism, the Brothers were asked to think about and discern what practices or exercises could be adopted by all members of the Congregation in order for us to live more deeply and intentionally the Charism of the Congregation. Here the suggested practices from the Brothers are grouped according to specific statements from the Description that gave rise to each suggested practice. You will see that certain themes are repeated. We did not want to combine similar practices in this document, but rather allow the Brothers to see all that was suggested, and thus see some common themes. The Working Committees for the General Chapter will further refine these practices based on feedback received from the Brothers individually, or from community/area gatherings.

At this stage of the process, you are invited to reflect on this material both individually and in community or area gatherings. Please identify what practices you support, or make suggestions as to any additional practices you think should be considered. Please send group summaries or individual responses to Stephanie Stricker at the Generalate by 15 June 2013. (Sstricker@xaverianbrothers.org). Chapter Delegates have been encouraged to help organize gatherings, if possible.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

"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. Following the path of our Founder, we are called to live ordinary lives that give witness to God's unconditional love."

Suggested practices:

1. I think that Associate Gail Dennig's description of the Xaverian Associate charism contains most of what I would suggest for the Associate program.
2. The Director should work carefully on the quality control of the program in terms of its finances, its provision for quality input at area meetings and large assemblies, his establishment of best practices for groups throughout the country, and his collaborative approach with the Associates and the Brothers.
3. The Brothers shall be encouraged to take part in Associate gatherings.
4. We need to plan ways in which the Associates, can more easily be "in communication with the Brothers"
5. We need to plan retreats, assemblies, etc. open to both Brothers and Associates
6. Associates along with Brothers could serve as area coordinators and be the "face" of the GS and lead area meetings and prayer gatherings.
7. Explore concept of temporary membership especially with the single male teachers in the XBSS schools.
8. Have specific times and events for meetings with the various Associate members.
9. Keep Brothers informed about Associates

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

In a spirit of hospitality... try to be approachable/available as true Brothers/sisters who welcome others and accompany them in joys and sorrows.

Suggested practices:

1. Kind

2. give witness
3. Participate in regional meetings of Associates
4. Invite prospective members into the Associate program.
5. Provide resources for prayer and reflection on Xaverian Spirituality to the Associates.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

“... place ourselves in humble service to Jesus through our service to others.”

Suggested practices:

1. Challenge Associates to develop ideas whereby they could participate more fully in this concept

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

“A band of Brothers who mutually help encourage, and edify one another and who work together.”

Suggested practices:

1. List our Associates in the Xaveriana and their ministries
2. Invite Associates to think of living for a period of time with/Brother(s) – or for regular prayer or get- togethers.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

As consecrated lay men, we Xaverians freely choose an “ordinary life” without privilege or entitlement, etc

Suggested practices:

1. As we grow more accustomed to involving our Xaverian Associates into our unspectacular lives, we need to discern together through area meetings, and our Area Coordinators, common, ordinary ways of inviting local Associates into the every day-ness of our prayer, communal and liturgical lives.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

“It is through our life of Gospel witness ... that we respond to the Spirit’s summons ‘to manifest God’s care and compassionate love to the people of the world in these times’.”

Suggested practice:

1. Part of each Associate’s daily prayer will include an exam of the quality of his/her presence to all those whom God sends into his/her life.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

“We believe that the Xaverian calling is a way of being put in our place in the world...from which we receive the grace to ... fall in love with God....”

Suggested practice:

1. Recognizing his need to nurture his love relationship with God, each Associate will seek out such appropriate resources as spiritual direction, days of

recollection, retreat, faith sharing groups, lectures and course work to supplement /her his daily/regular prayer life.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

“Our place in the Church is on the margins, in solidarity and availability among the people.”

Suggested practice:

1. In order to practice responsible awareness of current human needs, according to their personal abilities Xaverian Associates at all stages of life will take advantage of reading, attendance at lectures and other available resources.
2. As much as possible, Associates will use letter-writing and technology as ways to advocate for the needs of their sisters and brothers of all races and beliefs.

SPECIFIC STATEMENT FROM DESCRIPTION:

We are called to live our mission on the frontiers, etc.

Suggested practice:

1. We need to plan more ways in which Brothers and Associates work together, more intentionally, with us in the common mission to the poor and marginalized.

OTHER STATEMENTS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. I don't know enough about this right now in order to suggest practices to incorporate.
2. No discussion about associates!

Further Reflections, Reports and Suggestions in Preparation for the 27th General Chapter

Other Concerns

- The need to evaluate our present government structure
- Do we need a full-time vicar general?
- Some American Brothers feel removed from the general administration
- Is our government too based on a corporate model, keeping in mind the need for a pastoral style of leadership?
- Need for job descriptions for general councilors
- Will there some day be an open Chapter?
- Need for more convocations/regional meetings
- Lack of connection with our African Brothers
- In some areas of the congregation there is little understanding of the associate program
- Can Brothers fill some more of the positions on the generalate staff? What size of a staff in needed, is present staff too large?
- Need for more transparency on finances
- Are we asking the tough questions? Is religious life viable in this country? Is this our last phase in America? Do we really expect any vocations in the USA?
- Need for communal ministry in Kenya? A school?

Initial proposals for our coming Chapter

Rationale: It is my conviction that we religious are a community or fraternity of Brothers and that every effort be made to include each of us in the chapter proceedings and thus I propose as starters the following:

1. A STRAW VOTE BE TAKEN FOR OUR NEXT LEADER. Each Brother submit three names for the GS in order of his preference. This vote be tallied before the chapter as a guide to the chapter members. This procedure would give a sense of brotherly participation.
2. Our leader's title and that of his assistant be changed to reflect our brotherhood, our fraternity. 'General' implies military or squadron leader. Do we need a leader who is pastoral, concerned with members, facilitating our 'way', visible, . . . ? Many of our sister congregations use 'president' which seems quite appropriate for our brotherhood, our fraternity. Monastic leadership involves all the monks electing an abbot. Other religious use such terms as custodian, visitor, etc. all steering away from 'general' and toward a model of 'brotherliness'. Much more could be expanded here but the title says so much.
3. Each of us be invited for chapter deliberation subject to chapter member order. Again, a good way to enhance participation.

Subject:Community Meeting Regarding Preparation for the 27th General Chapter

Cadiz Community, Venice, Florida

*We began this process prior to receiving the Pre-Chapter materials that were sent out congregation wide! The Cadiz Community decided to begin preparation for the 27th General Chapter by reflecting on and reviewing the Directives of the 26th General Chapter.

General Comments/insights after reviewing the Directives of the 26th general Chapter:

---Looking over the Directives most Brothers felt that most of the Directives have not been carried out by the Leadership or by Brothers and local communities, ourselves included.

---The community felt that the coming Chapter review these directives and seek ways to have them implemented. Members felt that the major concerns of the Brothers and Delegates to the Chapter would still be the Areas covered by the Directives and would be areas of major concern today with others added. We did as a congregation tend to the Mission Formation by working on the Charism Study, the Contemplative Stance and somewhat with part of Ministry with the Poor and Marginalized (workshop on Scripture and Poverty).

---It was pointed out that we are good at establishing and writing directives but poor at measuring and evaluating how they are implemented (e.g. Directive from the 25th general Chapter on intentional Groups and how this is the primary way a Brother relates to the congregation and many of the directives from the 26th general Chapter). There seems to be a major gap between directives and how those are implemented in the reality of daily living.

---Some in the community felt that we are always stressing the Spiritual Life but there is much more to our life than this dimension.

--We are still dealing with the move from a highly structured life (prior to the Chapter of 1968) with direction from the top to a less structured life with self-direction and self-initiation with many of our men lacking the ability to initiate and self-direct . We have moved in our recent congregational government to highly top-heavy model which many American Brothers feel lacks collaboration with and input from American Brothers.

---Have we moved to a highly hierachal model of government leaving too much to the General Superior? Are we in need of a full-time active Vicar-General? Those elected to congregational offices of service need to have this as the main focus of their ministries. Our lives, our world and our church has become much more complicated and demanding but we seem to have fewer Brothers involved in the congregation governance.

Directive one Mission Formation

---The part of this directive concerning the Founder's Vision and Charism has been tended to and the efforts of those involved in this enterprise were praised.

---There was an uncertainty about the International Commission called for and it's work and the first part of the directive dealing with intentional groups, gathering in regions and in local communities to reflect, pray, and discern our communal mission. We as a local community have not had meetings for years. Are groups that are meeting sending results to congregational leadership? The African Region seems to be taking the lead in this area of Mission Formation. Our individual On-Going Formation is a challenge for each of us.

---As a group we have much more awareness of Ryken's Vision for the congregation and his choice of Francis Xavier as patron. We could not speak to the issue of inclusion of these key ideas in initial formation.

Community

--Most agreed that Community is a key area of our common lives that has been let go and overlooked especially in the USA Region. This directive needs to be discussed and made a priority. We have done much work and a task force was set up and worked on the Associate Program. We need a task force to assist us on the revitalization of community life. Has the time passed for revitalization of community life in the USA Region?

--As with most active religious congregations we seem to be having major difficulties with community. We wonder whether our difficulties with community might stem from two different visions...one which sees our ministry as a priority, supported by community life and prayer...the other which sees spiritual practices and growth along with community the priority, which is then expressed in ministry. The issue gets further complicated by the question of what is our ministry?

--We have very few vibrant communities in the USA. Our discussions brought to the fore very quickly what attracted us to the congregation and the very different formation programs and lifestyles we have lived under historically and how these have impacted our present living and vision of religious life.

Contemplative Stance

--We felt that the Contemplative Stance Directive is one that is ongoing and basic to our lives as vowed religious and Xaverian Brothers and involves a life-long work of ongoing and communal formation.

--We as a congregation and as individual continue to struggle to balance the active and contemplative dimensions of our lives. This has been a challenge for many who were formed with an emphasis on ACTIVE Ministry and little on Contemplation/Spiritual formation. This Contemplative Stance is hard work...challenging!

Ministry with the Poor and Marginalized

----We have not done much with the first paragraph of this Directive. Many felt that the Directive challenged us directly and hit too close to home having us examining our style of life, common life/common ownership, dependence up and accountability to community, and how we connect and interact with the social structures of the larger world ?A workshop with John Donahue, SJ was held and DVD of his presentation were distributed throughout the congregation. There seemed to be a positive response to this but little more seems to have been done with this Directive. There are a wealth of challenges in this Directive if we have the courage to face them individually, regionally and congregationally.

Internationality

---In many ways this is the most challenging of the Directives from the last chapter. We pay "lip-service" to the idea of being an "international missionary congregation" and we have taken baby-steps in this area. We were not sure if we as a congregation realize the implication of INTERNATIONALITY. We face many complications in working towards implementing this directive: language, culture, stereotyping, and various governmental issues (visas, travel to and from various countries, etc.). The African Region seems to be working at this. Age, distance, etc. seem to impeded more American involvement. We need to keep working at it. Use of the social-media especially Living the Charism page has introduced us to many young African Brothers and for those who have viewed their interviews and sharings...there is a deeper sense of our common brotherhood and a sense that Ryken dream lives anew.

Discerning Direction

---We noted that we have not evaluated our 'new' government that has been in place for 18 years. The group felt that there is a need to tweak the current government that does not seem to give much room for interaction/collaboration among the American Brothers. The group also felt that we hope that the Chapter Delegates not rush into changing the current form of government without a task force being set up to evaluate it, tweak it and make recommendations for change.

Further Thoughts for the Consideration of Delegates to the General Chapter

In anticipation of the upcoming Chapter, I would like to share a few thoughts with you. As my location precludes attending any meetings, I am using this medium.

HONESTY: Who are we and where are we going? I am most grateful to Jim Connolly for sharing the recent article from Human Development: Authentic Responses to the Future of Religious Life. I would hope every member of the Chapter has access to this article as it can help to chart a future we create rather than fall into. The Big Question: If we die in the U.S what happens to our brothers in Africa?

LEADERSHIP: Even though we are a very small group it appears that the leadership model that I have seen for 20 years is more corporate and hierarchical instead of egalitarian and gospel. In the Benedictine model of chapter, everyone has a voice. I think we need more and regular meetings not only to discuss pertinent issues but for prayer and fraternity. The current model of leadership which places the entire burden (at least seemingly) on one person could be revamped to allow a better distribution of responsibilities. I have heard many times that when brothers are asked to do something, they say 'no'. Perhaps the wrong brothers are being asked. Some brothers have commented on a type of 'clericalism' in the Congregation; brothers who are 'in' and brothers who are 'out'. I know it is not possible to be part of a group without being hurt and hurting others. I am sure I have hurt others; I have also felt hurt. Is there a Christian style of collaborative leadership that can ameliorate some of this hurt and sense of estrangement?

MEMBERSHIP: CANONICAL OR ECCLESIAL OR BOTH?: The severe shortage of priests is due in part to the fact that women and married men may not be ordained. If our Congregation wants to grow, would we be willing to give up canonical status so women, couples straight and gay could have full membership- not just for the sake of increased numbers but more and effective ministries, especially to the poor and marginalized. The Sisters For Christian Community are ecclesial, but not canonical- the Catholic Worker model could be a viable one. Outreach to the Hispanic and Asian communities in the U.S. have been fruitful for the Society of the Divine Word; there are several SVD's who live near me and commented on this. Recent studies have indicated many young people are looking for traditional communities. Perhaps a few of our brothers could come together and pursue this in a sustained way.

AGEISM AND TEAMS OF TWO OR THREE: Regardless of age, everyone can do something. I am familiar with the Sisters of Mercy who have 'senior' sisters living in poor urban and rural areas, primarily as a witness and helping neighbors however they can. Such an 'ordinary' ministry but certainly in line with our charism!

COMFORT ZONE: Most of us are guilty of living a lifestyle that is more middle class than reflective of community life in the Act of the Apostles. I come back with a collaborative leadership that is prophetic, visionary and calls us out of that zone to proclaim more authentically the kingdom of God. There is a lot of gobbledegook about the Holy Spirit and papal and congregational elections but I do believe in the power of the Spirit to shape and lead us- if we are willing to be shaped and led AND DO SOMETHING!

COMMENTS OF BROTHERS MEETING AT THE NORTH SHORE March 9, 2013

- I think our community should be thinking about changes for the sake of the future of the congregation. . I would say for example living in mixed communities (priests, consecrated, married)....
- I think we should strongly emphasize community life. We should not be living alone to make things easy for us. If we lose our sense of living in community, our future is hopeless.
- When I started reading this description as an expression of our charism, most of it is new for me. But as I read it, as I reflect on it, I realized that this describes a life that I have lived in any community wherever I had been.
- An American poet from New England wrote, "What we are, we are always doing." (This is to affirm the above point)
- Communicating through the computer and the new media has not been very effective in reaching out to us who are intimidated by the Internet. We brothers have not been communicating well with each other, creating a vacuum among us and truly preventing us from feeling that we are part of a community.
- If we are trying to convey an agenda for the next chapter, one of them should be on communication. For idiots like me who don't use the Internet the way I should, our

communication with the Generalate has been very detached. We need to hear more directly from the people there.

- This issue became evident during the preparation for the Assembly. Someone told us the discussions going on there was on the blog. But we don't know what a blog is. That's why it's difficult for some of us to accept the description because we didn't get involved in the assembly. There has to be more emphasis on fraternity and involvement with each other.
- Life is generating for the congregation in Africa. But there does not seem to be work on finding opportunities for our brothers there to meet us here. Wouldn't that cause the development of a different way of being Xaverian, the fact that they are unable to witness the life as it had developed in the West among Americans, Belgians and English.
- I would like to meet our African brothers and see them as my fellow Xaverian Brothers. I want to see them as my Brothers.
- The pictures in our weekly bulletins do not usually show our African brothers. They must be feeling like second-class citizens when we only show American brothers.
- We should show the interview with the African brothers to the entire community so that most of us can see it. It would also be good to do it also in reverse, that is let some of the brothers here be interviewed so that the African brothers can also see and hear us.
- It would be good if some of the sessions of the general chapter that will take place in Rome could be something we could see streamed on the internet.
- What if we could have African brothers living with us in the US and in Belgium? These young brothers are dynamic. If we have them with older brothers who, through their experience, give them stability in the life, that may generate new life here.
- In the history of the church, the number of vocations to religious life keeps going up and down. I believe that we need to pray for more vocations. I'm not quitting in prayer.
- We should be careful in saying that Africa is "the future of the congregation." It seems to me dismissive of the experiences and contributions of the brothers here, as if our phase is over and so let's just pay attention to what's happening there but not here.

Intentional Group Meeting—Venice Florida, April 26-27, 2013

Members: Jim Connolly, Paul Cullen, George Donnelly, Kenney Gorman, Bob Green, Ray Hoyt, John McDonald, Jerry O'Leary

Subject—Elucidation of Practices: Community and, Ministry and Mission, Finances, Governance, and Spirituality Associates

At the gathering of our Intentional Group in Venice in May, one theme which can be seen in this summary of the ideas brought up in our freewheeling discussion on the elucidation of practices in preparation for the 27th General Chapter was that at this time in our history we need for the General Superior to engage in a collaborative style of leadership, to delegate work substantially, and to have pastoral leadership as a priority.

Comments:

- — importance of gatherings—not unlike these IG meetings—at the grassroots level—with “conveners”
- — collaborative leadership, governance animating involvement of brothers
- — consultation in the process of decision-making
- — finances control everything, e.g., affordable housing
- — limited community options
- — some reservations regarding suitability and/or accepting federal housing
- — care of the elderly tied to finances
- — regarding the finances for the care of elderly, the Isidore Charitable Trust seems to be well funded for the medical and retirement needs of our elderly brothers
- — budgetary problems around operating expenses are connected with the lessening of income from fewer working brothers
- — need for financial transparency
- — importance of reflecting on the purpose, the why, of a band of brothers
- — charism animates mission
- — charism influenced by Jesuits, Dominicans, Redemptorists, as much as by the Dutch mystics
- — mysticism absorbed in religious culture of the day
- — our charism has evolved through the lived reality
- — thinking about the development of the charism influenced by many people and events, where does our identity/self-understanding as a missionary brotherhood through formation/education get referenced—that element not from the mystics
- — Ryken doesn’t totally define our charism—it has evolved
- — importance of sharing ideas that filter up
- — perhaps a modification of the XBSS is needed at this time
- — leadership present to all brothers
- — regular structured/schedule gatherings are important for providing input to leadership
- — in addition to congregational interests, social justice issues and spiritual topics would provide opportunities of learning and sharing, effecting change through letter-writing, taking action, co-signing support, etc.
- — separate housing militates community
- — community housing needs to be available for community-building to take place
- — the general superior should meet annually with each brother
- — delegation of authority is needed to implement administrative policies
- — we seem to want and expect pastoral leadership, but often elect administrators

- — there's a movement of the Holy Spirit in the whole Church since the advent of Francis, especially with his calls to get out with the people
 - — every time seems to call forth or give us the type of leader we need
 - — the administrators have kept the structures afloat
 - — the present and future seem to need a pastoral type, supported by others who can handle administration
 - — governance requires a designated general councilor or delegate to attend to the welcome growth in membership and the development of our ministries and missions in Republic of Congo and Kenya
 - — a need to evaluate our structure of governance, perhaps with a special follow-up chapter after a year or two of new leadership under the present form
 - — need to define roles before elections/selections of personnel
 - — Associates find different ways of coming together, e.g., Skype
 - — clusters may be model for gatherings of conversation on selected topics, e.g., pre-retirement, retirement, aging, social justice issues, etc.
 - — need to be kept informed of what's going on congregationally
 - — the videos are helpful for getting to know our brothers in Congo and Kenya, etc.
 - — African brothers need to come here to get an experience of American brothers and vice-versa
 - — exchange of cultural visions is helpful in embracing our international character
 - — building trust while building community
 - — biographies of new members as with the Associates
 - — our gift of ordinariness needs to be affirmed through equality
 - — group-gatherings promote our presence and hospitality toward one another
 - — professional assistance may be helpful in enhancing community and our spiritual/prayer life
 - — why are we a band of brothers? what is our purpose? "are we all together alone?"
 - — community promotes sharing the challenges of today together
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For the 27th General Chapter: The need for a modus operandi of connectedness

At this time the Brothers need a General Superior who delegates work substantially to his staff and the members of the General Council, and has as his top priority to provide a way for all the Brothers to feel and be connected with what is happening in the Congregation. This role is primarily pastoral but also provides a means for a more horizontal style of governance. In order for the General Superior to help lead the way in bringing about this "connectedness" there needs to be an established protocol. It seems that a lot of hard work has already been done in Kenya and the Congo to establish this connectedness through the emphasis on regional meetings and community meetings and this should continue. But our African Brothers might also include some of the following modus operandi

The Chapter needs to come up with the principles which would lead to the establishment of this protocol of connectness which would lead to a specific modus operandi. The following is only one possible (hopefully not too impractical) example of a modus operandi.

A possible modus operandi of Connectedness

1. Nomination by the Brothers of Brother Facilitators who are welcoming, inclusive individuals who could be successful in convening small groups of Brothers who wish to be more connected with what is happening in the Congregation
2. Meeting of these Brothers with the General Superior to engage in a workshop which will provide:
 - a. a "hands-on" demonstration of how a small group can develop trust and support among one another and share thoughts on important topics relating to the Congregation, the Church, and the world.
 - b. how the Brother can easily convey the group's thoughts, concerns, etc. to the General Superior
(those who are already proficient in all this can help others to assimilate this)
3. The Brother Facilitator would invite a small group of Brothers to join with him periodically (in person or by electronical method) for a morning, afternoon, or evening gathering for prayer, socializing, mutual support and to share thoughts on important topics, and would convey to the General Superior any concerns, questions, or observations , or suggestions which the group would like him to convey.
4. The General Superior would meet with the Brother Facilitators at least twice a year and would include in his messages to all the Brothers his responses to what was brought up at all these small group meetings.
5. The General Superior would arrange for African Brothers to join at times with American Brothers in their gatherings, and for American Brothers to join with African Brothers in theirs (in person or by skype)
6. The General would meet with each Brother every three years
7. The General Superior would strongly urge the Brothers to join with Xaverian Associates at their meetings.