



Unity and Diversity in Consecrated Life and in the Voluntas Dei Institute

Formation Theme (2011-2012): Unity and Diversity

Opening Quote:

"The members of Secular Institutes are, by vocation and mission, the point of encounter between the initiative of God and the expectation of creation: the initiative of God which they bring into the world through love and intimate union with God; the expectation of creation, which they share in the daily and secular condition of life with others." [Pope John Paul II, February 1, 1997]

Introduction:

By its very nature, a consecration lived in a diverse world with an intentional sharing in "the daily and secular condition of life with others" demands a diversity of expressions. In a similar way, we know that throughout history the various forms of living a religious consecration arose in response to diverse circumstances to serve diverse needs with members of diverse gifts. Therefore, though united by a common vow (profession of evangelical counsels), Institutes of Consecrated Life show significant (and healthy) diversity: between Institutes, within international Institutes (for example among Districts in our own Institute), within Districts (for example among sectors and teams on our own District), and between individual members (for example the different ministries or states of life for members within a team). Further, on all of these levels the diversity is ever increasing if compared between past, present and future.

Some unity among consecrated and related forms of life is provided through our governance by the Vatican Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Consecrated Life. Religious institutes and secular institutes are the two main categories which constitute the state of consecrated life through profession of the evangelical counsels in the Church. Societies of apostolic life are defined by can. 731.1 and 731.2 in the 1983 Code of Canon Law as follows: "Comparable to institutes of consecrated life are societies of apostolic life whose members without religious vows pursue the particular apostolic purpose of the society, and leading a life as brothers or sisters in common according to a particular manner of life, strive for the perfection of charity through the observance of the constitutions..."

Secular Institutes are also united through a common interest in promotion of the vocation internationally. To this end, on 23 May 1974, the Holy See gave juridic personality to the World Conference of Secular Institutes (Conference Mondiale Instituts Seculiers, or CMIS). "CMIS is a place of encounter, exchange and research at the service of the Institutes...CMIS has the aim of organizing the collaboration between Secular Institutes so as to enable them to be more effectively "a leaven for the vigor and the growth of the Body of Christ" in the world. The CMIS website (<http://www.cmis-int.org/index.php>) has some useful resources, including a map showing many Institute locations (<http://www.cmis-int.org/index.php?pagina=53>).

Fr. Parent, writing *In the Footsteps of Jesus*, stated "I feel drawn to a certain category of people...we are too selective. Instead, we must go to everyone, welcome everyone. Feelings are like magnets that only stick to certain kinds of metal. This sensible attraction is too limited, it limits our capacity to love. The bee does not analyze the flower which shares a part of its riches with it...it wants to be faithful to its mission." Imitating the spirit of Fr. Parent, in this team lesson you are encouraged to open your mind and heart to an increasing fellowship with the members of secular institutes throughout our nation and throughout the world who, like us, are doing their best to bring about God's Kingdom of Peace by living as consecrated seculars in their particular situations.

Reading 1a – World Conference of Secular Institutes Newsletter

[Excerpt from [CMIS E-Dialogue, No. 9, 2011](#), by Robert Daviaud]:

Faith and evangelical consistency are a challenge in the lives of all of us. There is always a gap between the greatness of God's call and the smallness of our response. We are aware that we are "clay vases." Nonetheless, let us not forget the treasure given to us and which we bring into the world. In any case, this is a calling to the realism of the spiritual life. Listen to the Word of God and put it into practice! With the power of the Holy Spirit how can we forge ahead in a missionary existence with joyfulness and resolve? This is the challenge of holiness in ordinary life and in the responsibilities entrusted to us.

Another challenge is that of the witness of the members of secular institutes both inside and outside the Church. From the very outset our attitude has been characterized by humility and certain degree of discretion. Given the evolution of the presence of Christianity in society, and at a time when Church leaders are encouraging "a new evangelization", what is the right attitude to assume in order to take part in this missionary thrust?

The call to live this special vocation in secular institutes is certainly most timely. If this is God's will, how should we work hard in really looking for the persons who could be invited to follow this way?

Reading 1b –United States Conference of Secular Institutes, USCSI

(<http://www.secularinstitutes.org/index.htm>)

The United States Conference of Secular Institutes (USCSI) was established following the organization of the World Conference of Secular Institutes in Rome. Its membership is open to all canonically erected secular institutes with members living in the United States. The conference was organized to offer secular institutes an opportunity to exchange experiences, to do research in order to help the Church carry out its mission, and to search for ways and means to make known the existence of secular institutes in the U.S. The USCSI mission is to make "known, understood, and appreciated the call to consecrated secularity in the Catholic Church." USCSI collaborates with other groups to present consecrated secularity as a viable option in today's Church. Among the useful content on the USCSI website (<http://www.secularinstitutes.org>) is an Institute Directory (<http://www.secularinstitutes.org/directory.htm>) which lists over 30 Institutes that have some presence in the United States. In recent years, between 15 and 20 Institutes have normally participated in USCSI activities and governance.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion – Secular institutes nationally and internationally

1. What is your level of awareness of the many institutes and members throughout the world living the secular consecration, and of the World Conference that represents us?
2. Do you feel any sense of unity or connection to others living a consecrated life throughout the world, or even in our own country? Do you pray for/with others living this same form of consecrated life, beyond those in our own Institute? If not, should we?

Reading 2 – Brief highlights from other US Secular Institutes

About 80% of secular institutes are for single women, and the next most prevalent are those for priests and/or single men. Voluntas Dei is the only Institute in the US that involves married couples as associate members along with priests and single men, and fully welcomes and supports the spiritual affiliation of single women. Below we look at a few of the Institutes for single women in order to better understand how they are similar and how they are different from us, and how we can learn from them.



The Don Bosco Volunteers (DBV) are consecrated women who live in the world, dress like other women, work among others; they carry on a quiet and steady mission of making Christ and His message known through the witness of their personal lives and apostolic response to the needs of the hour. More than 1300 consecrated persons are members of this secular institute worldwide, in countries throughout Europe, Eastern Europe, Asia, Australia, the Philippines, Central and South American, the United States, Canada and among the African nations. The Volunteers are a part of the Salesian Family, and so follow the Salesian spirituality. A few items from their spirituality for us to consider:

- Since all people are called to holiness, then the means to achieve that holiness must be readily available. One lives the "devout life" by passionately and joyfully meeting the demands of one's state in life for the love of God. It is not so much what you do in your life but how and for whom you do it. We are called to do the ordinary "passionately well."
- The devout life is relational. It is in the living out of our relationships in love that one lives the devout life.
- Humility leads us GENTLENESS towards our neighbor. Gentleness is not weakness, but rather controlled, directed and loving strength. It might also be described as knowing how to react to life appropriately and proportionately. To quote DeSales: "There is nothing so strong as gentleness and nothing so gentle as real strength."
- The PRESENT MOMENT is where a Christian lives life. The past is over. The future is yet to be. "NOW is the time of salvation."
- A truly devout life enhances one's life. Real devotion never inconveniences others.
- We are called to be patient with everyone, especially ourselves.
- We are called to a "liberty of spirit"—something which includes obedience but which excludes "constraint, scruples and anxiety." "Liberty of spirit" is to obedience to lawful authority, as jazz is to the rules of classical music.



The Secular Institute of Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ (SIM), an international institute of pontifical right is located in more than 30 countries throughout the world. The life is one of total consecration to God in the spirit of St. Francis in order to fulfill a mission in the world. The name "Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ" reminds its members of the purpose of their consecration - the mission of giving witness to Christ, first born of all creatures, Lord of the universe and center of history. Missionaries collaborate in spreading the reign of God. They become an original sign of the mission of the Church in the world. Through lives of witness and service, members become a leaven to transform the world from within.

"Authentic Franciscan spirituality may be defined as the cultivation of the Franciscan virtues: humility instead of self-centered ambition, poverty as a means of achieving freedom of spirit, joyful confidence in God which prevents our losing heart amid the difficulties of life, and finally the desire to serve as true apostles and witnesses as an expression of our love of the Lord." (Cardinal F. Antonelli, OFM)



The Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate are women of faith, lay women, consecrated to God, committed to living the Gospel at the heart of the world. As members of a Secular Institute, they live in the same conditions as their contemporaries and they share their common concerns. Today, there are more than 500 members in approximately twenty countries in the Americas, Europe, Asia and Africa. They are present in various milieus (family, ecclesial, professional, social, and cultural) through a trade or profession of their choice. By their presence and their work, they contribute to the transformation of the world from within in the manner of leaven.

The Oblates commit themselves by vows to keep:

- their hearts free for universal and unconditional love;
- their hands free to share with others, in a spirit of solidarity;
- their spirits free to be available to God and to others.

In presenting the Three-Fives spirituality, they describe the 5 attitudes of life as:

1. Presence of God - To be attentive to the presence of God in the present moment
2. Abstention from destructive criticism interior and exterior - To learn to look at our self and others with love
3. Abstention from useless complaint interior and exterior - To welcome events positively.
"The sense of wonder disappears wherever there is complaint." [Father Louis-Marie Parent]
4. Being of service - To direct one's life towards the service of others
5. Peacemaker - To strive to foster peace in all circumstances

Questions for Reflection and Discussion – Other US Secular Institutes

1. Have you ever met or interacted with members from another secular institute, through the USCSI or through other contacts? Should you make an effort to do so?
 2. Have you learned anything useful about or from other secular institutes, including their spirituality and practices? Should you make an effort to do so?
 3. Have you studied any materials from OMMI (the other institute founded by Fr. Parent) to get another perspective on our shared spirituality? If yes, what did you learn? If no, should you make an effort to do so?
 4. How can our relationship with other secular institutes be a model of unity and diversity?
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Reading 3 – Voluntas Dei District membership and 2010 General Assembly Report Excerpts:

Canada

The Canadian District of the Voluntas Dei Institute covers all of Canada.

The Canadian District has 157 members who are present in 4 provinces and 20 dioceses. It is composed of 7 sectors with a total of 20 teams. Each sector has between two and four teams, and between 10 and 31 members.

At the 2007 Canadian District Assembly (Live the Realism of the Present Moment... in Hope), the reality of aging was addressed. Given: *the aging of members (average age >60 years); the needs associated with the reality of aging (health: economic, physical, and psychological); that aging*

brings with it frailties; that aging brings a decline in energies and availability for leadership; that aging increases expenses and lessens revenues; that aging brings wisdom to be shared; that the mission continues throughout all stages of life; and the temptation to isolate oneself when feeling useless;

WE SUGGEST: that the reality of aging in our Canadian District be retained as one of the two essential priorities demanding of the next Director and his Council to set into motion a work to ensure the quality of life of the members and the richness of their contribution to our mission.

1.4.1.1 Members of the Institute according to their state of life.

2004		2010		Average age
Priests	46	Priests	51	66.3
Celibate Deacons	04	Celibate Deacons	03	64
Candidates to Orders	03	Candidates to Orders	02	41.5
Celibate laymen	11	Celibate laymen	12	58.4
Married persons (1 deacon)	84	Married persons	86	61.9
Widowed persons	2	Widowed persons	02	
Total	150	Total	156	2004 = 57.5 2010 = 62.8

1.4.1.2 Members according to the stages of incorporation.

Status	Number
Aspirants	06
Probationers	07
Committed before stability	30
Professed before stability	07
Stability	106
Total	156

Sri Lanka – District-in-Formation

Sri Lanka is an island in the Indian Ocean off the southeast tip of India. The population is about 21 million with 74% of Sinhalese, 17.5% of Tamils, 7.1% of Muslims and 1.4% of others. It has multi religious context with Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christians. Christians are only 7.5% in the country. Sri Lanka was suffering with the ethnic war for the last 32 years between the Sinhalese and Tamils and it caused several deaths, injuries and displacements to the people and destructions of houses and churches. This was a great concern for all our members and very especially for our founder Late Rev. Fr. Louis Marie Parent OMI. To all of our surprise the war came to an end on the very day of the heavenly birth of our founder. The effect of war is still there in Sri Lanka on the people including some of our members. They are still in the refugee camps.

Considering the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka, we have 01 Archdiocese and 10 Dioceses with one Archbishop and twelve bishops. There are 43 religious congregations out of which 17 men and 26 women working in those dioceses. The one and only Secular Institute in Sri Lanka is Institute Voluntas Dei. Institute Voluntas Dei was introduced by our Founder to the late bishop Emilianuspillai, the former Bishop of Jaffna, in Rome during the Vatican Council in 1962. He invited Fr. Parent to Sri Lanka to recruit the members. Responding the invitation Fr. Parent stepped in Sri Lanka in January 1963 and brought 5 men from Jaffna Sri Lanka out of whom one left, three

Dominican Republic / Altagracia District

Father Michel Laroche established the Voluntas Dei Institute in the Dominican Republic on September 19, 1971; the Institute in the Republic is thus 39 years old. The district has experienced a constant growth between 2004 and 2010. Seven Dominican priests were ordained and five young men from other countries came to our house of formation for training and ordination. We have fifteen major seminarians: ten in philosophy and five in theology, as well as seven minor seminarians at Hato Mayor del Rey, for a total of twenty-two seminarians.

Five new teams have been formed: one at Miches with nine couples, with two other couples who have joined the Rosary Team; there is one team at Hato Mayor with nine couples, and three teams in Santo Domingo with 13 couples, for a total of thirty-three new couples.

Associate Members (5 married deacons)	240
Celibate Permanent Deacon	001
Major Seminarians	015
Minor Seminarians	007
Dominican Priests	015
Foreign Priests	004
Other Voluntas Priests who do not belong to the District	005
Total members in the District	284

Sector, Number of Teams and of Members

Location	Teams	Number of Members
Miches	05	85
Sabana de la Mar	02	27
Las Mercedes	03	79
Santo Domingo	05	86
Santiago de los Caballeros in form.	01	07
Total	15	284

Number of Members by Status of Incorporation

Aspirants	45
Probationers	24
Professed before Stability	04
Committed Members	60
Stability	151

India - District in Formation

Established in 1967. Designated a District in Formation on March 1, 2009. The Major Seminary is Our Lady of Miracle, Aluva. The Minor Seminary is Bethel, Thiruvananthapuram.

STATISTICAL BREAK DOWN OF THE MEMBERSHIP AS ON 31ST MARCH 2010

a.	Priest incardinated in the Institute :	22
	Incardinated in dioceses:	4
	Priest in profession:	1
	Total:	<u>27</u>
b.	Single laymen:	0
c.	Married couples in Aspirancy :	40
	Married couples in Probation:	8
	Married couples in Commitments:	32
	Total:	<u>80</u>
d.	Seminarians in Aspirancy:	5
	Seminarians in Probation:	10
	Seminarians in Profession:	23
	Total:	<u>38</u>

Thus India district-in-formation is composed of **145** members, that is:

- 27 Priests
- 38 Candidates to priesthood
- 80 Associate members

Haiti - District

The Council of the Haiti District of the Voluntas Dei Institute and its director take the opportunity of the Assembly General of the Institute to present a report on the life and activities of the Haiti District which, thanks be to God, was largely spared from the earthquake. The Institute's buildings in Port-au-Prince housing our chapel and conference room have major fissures and are unsafe. If we want to save the main floor, we shall have to demolish the floor above and rebuild with light material (wood and metal). Despite our difficulties, we have learned to hope because we firmly believe that Haiti will not die. The country's reconstruction must be done first through the work of its sons and daughters and, obviously, by keeping in mind the solidarity of friends, and of those countries friendly to Haiti. We will never be able to do the work all by ourselves. As a secular institute, we are called to play a role in this reconstruction. How? This is the question that needs answering. The event of January 12 was really a wake-up call to the Haitian people. We are all in one way or another affected by what has happened, and we are still traumatized by it.

It is very much at the heart of this reality that the Voluntas Dei Institute, present in the country for over 40 years, exercises its mission with the help of God and is called to be of service and be peacemakers. The event of last January 12 gave the members of the Institute an opportunity to be of service to others. The doors of our house at Bolosse (our house of formation) were opened to the people around. For three months we our water supply was at the service of the population, thanks to an agreement with our water distributor, Eau Miracle. Thanks to the food supplies given by the confreres of the Dominican Republic and elsewhere, we were able to feed our seminarians

and the house personnel, and we were also able to help some of the couples in the Institute and, for a month, several families that were victims of the earthquake.

The district has three sectors composed of five teams:

- Jacmel: one team of priests, couples and single laymen.
- Jérémie: one team composed of priests and couples.
- Port-au-Prince: two teams composed of seminarians, priests, and couples.

Members in the strict sense: priests and candidates to the priesthood

Description	Priests with Stability	Sem./Prof.	Sem./Prob.	Beginners	Pre-beginners
Total	33	10	03	04	02

Committed Members

Description	Committed Couples without Stability	Couples Probationers	Couples Aspirants	Widower Committed without Stability	Veuve Eng. S.S	Veuves aspirantes ?
Total	06	05	04	01	01	02

Members in the Strict Sense : Laymen

Description	Professed Layman without Stability	Layman Probationer	Layman Aspirant
Total	1	1	0

Chile District-in-Formation

The Institute in Chile was founded in 1982. The earthquake and the tidal wave of February 27, 2010 devastated over half the continental territory within a few minutes, and the lives of over six million inhabitants living across more than one thousand kilometres was changed forever. Our places of worship were affected. We have tremendous work to do to rebuild our religious cultural heritage, but especially to give our people the hope they need in order to begin over again.

STATISTICS BY TEAMS AND CATEGORIES

TEAM	ASPIRANTS	PROBATIONERS	PROFESSED	STABILITY	DECEASED
LINARES				6	
VIÑA DEL MAR				7	
CHILLÁN				2	2
SANTIAGO			1	4	
LA SERENA		3	4	3	
ANTOFAGASTA		1			

About 20 of the 31 members are married couples. Three sectors have been established in the district, each with two teams under the direction of the sector and team animators.

Columbia Region

The Institute's founding is dated March 21, 1979, under the guidance of Pierre Marois from the Canadian District. The 31 years of the Institute's presence in Colombia had all kinds of problems, but there has been much hope and a great openness and sense of welcome. Besides, the Institute is an answer to the new generations who see there a simple and concrete form of involvement for building up the Kingdom, peace, and brotherhood in Jesus Christ.

STATISTICS OF MEMBERS

Priests	2
Permanent Deacon	1
Couples	4
Major Seminarians (Probationers)	2
Major Seminarian (Aspirant)	1
Widow	1
Laymen with Stability	2
Candidates to the Priesthood	4
Candidates to Lay Consecration	<u>2</u>
Total	19

Questions for Reflection and Discussion – The Voluntas Dei Institute:

1. Did any of the information provided by the Districts surprise you or interest you?
2. Do you know any members of other Voluntas Dei districts? Should we try to build relationships with members of other districts?
3. Do you visit the International Institute's main web page (<http://www.voluntasdei.org/>) occasionally to check for updates from the Central Administration and other Districts?
4. Do you read the newsletters from the Director and the Vocations and Missions office, and respond with prayers or any other support to join in deeper solidarity with the International Institute?

Opportunities for Action

1. What can you do to become more aware of and connected to the universal nature and missionary character of our Institute?
2. Do you feel God is calling you to any action concerning connecting spiritually, physically, or materially with members of other Voluntas Dei Districts or regions? Connecting with members of other secular institutes?

