

Spiritans Assembly June 19, 2007 Pittsburgh

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Good Morning

I want to thank you for this opportunity to be with you all and share with you my thoughts on the challenge of becoming a very diverse looking Mission community from what we may have joined whenever that was. I am sure that there are questions in your minds like “What does the present and the future hold for us? How can we deal with it? How can we strive and thrive?” The challenge of multiculturalism, interculturalism, internationalization, whatever one wants to call it, moves us all to some places we never would have thought we would go.

I have been asked to share with you some ideas on Mission and Charism and the challenge of intercultural living. And I am prepared to do that, I bit... my own little contribution to your days of the Spirit.

If there is anything I would want you to take from my sharing it is two simple thoughts.... Nothing more... These two thoughts frame all that I am about to say.

The first thought is about mystery versus question.

The second is charism versus belonging.

I somehow had this thought about mystery vs question before, almost like a working assumption, a hunch in my life, but it got articulated well as I read a book about seminary living. I read *The Collar*. Somewhere in the beginning of the book was shared a conversation about vocation. The speaker was telling a seminarian or a prospective seminarian, that when looking at the call, or the whole vocation of priest, one needs to look at the mystery of it all as the first concern. It is a mystery, not a question.

It has to be seen as a whole, a gift. Those who bring questions first to the conversation get lost and exacerbated by the questions rather than appreciate the mystery. (the question of celibacy, women's ordination, liberal vs conservative, which am I?) I think there is a lot of wisdom in that, not only for vocation, but for the very reality that we are sharing these days. When new membership looks different from what it was in the past, when it introduces the community to a variety of cultural forms different or new from the community's experience, when our complacency is threatened...When our sense of Mission changes because of their insights, experience and prayer. Where do we start the search for the way forward? Do we first acknowledge the mystery of this new reality and together come up with appropriate and important questions that may help us understand this mystery in part? Or do we allow the questions to come up first, avoiding the recognition of the mystery of God's new spirit happening in our midst, questions that betray our discomfort and fear, on both sides... but questions that do not support a nurturing of community growth through welcoming inclusion of new realities, experiences, membership, questions that are not of equal "power" or "weight". My hunch is that questions of the older community members would be *accountability* questions, *challenge to live up to expectation* questions for the younger members (do they measure up? To whose standard?), "This is the way we do things, don't you know?" questions. The questions from younger membership would be "can I live up to these expectations" questions, "would I ever be accepted" questions, "how can I do this" questions.

Questions are real. They are complex. They are nested, intertwined, like a bird's nest, but somehow they have to be seen as a whole, a nest, that will support the new birth that is happening to the community rather than choke the new birth in discomfort. Unless we acknowledge the presence of mystery and spirit first, the questioning gives the advantage to the established community members rather than those who recently entered or those who are interested in new ways of the Spirit. And the questions never end. And they could hide the mystery in the fear of it all. We are looking at this development and future filled with hope as mystery, a mystery whose questions will touch both long time members as well as new. There has to be a mutuality in the questioning to make it work.

One practical way of monitoring that mystery in each of us is to look at those scriptural underpinnings that support our vocation. I call them Scripture signatures. When I first entered the missionary community I belong to, the Xaverian Missionaries, one of the motivating passages for me was found in the Benedictus of Luke. I heard Zachariah pray and could really identify with the call that John the Baptist be prophet “and you, child, will be called prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.” That fit me like a glove. I was to be the Missionary. Sent. To share knowledge, experience and fight sin. I come from St. Catherine’s in Norwood, the home town of great missionaries like Gene Hillman, Jim and Joe McDonough, many Maryknollers, Columbans, Jesuits, OMI’s.....Bostonians were sent, motivated by the great missionary Archbishop, Richard Cardinal Cushing.

As my years of mission ministry matured and changed, so did my scripture signature. I now can identify more with 1 John 1 1-4... “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands, concerns the Word of Life. For the life was made visible we have seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was made visible to us, what we have seen and heard we proclaim now to you so that you too may have fellowship with us. For our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. WE are writing this so that our joy may be complete.” Mission in all its mystery is now witness. As simple as that. Wherever I am, whomever I am with, the spirit is present and active and I am just called to be the witness of the Spirit’s action. And in each of these situations, what Mission is is defined from the context and persons that witness this power of the spirit. That is the mystery of it all. I try not to let the questions of propriety get in the way.

This leads to the second consideration that I want to share with you... that of intercultural living. This is the challenge of so many of our communities. This is the future of religious life which I am sure that Barbara will talk more of tomorrow, but from my 15

years of formation ministry and 12 years of years in Sierra Leone I have something to say.

Seven years ago in Chicago Fr. Bob Schrieter aided our formation council when looking at new membership, especially from cultures other than the dominant.

For us, in the dominant culture, the concern for us in putting together a formation program or a way of including new membership to our community is to guarantee that the charism is maintained, understood, integrated, made a part of the new person's life. Our questions are: Do they get it!!! And are we sure they get it. How can we evaluate that fact? Bob believes that from the perspective of the new candidates, especially those of other cultures, whatever that may mean, since I see you are not only looking at geographical/ethnic cultural differences, but other challenging differences, like including laity in your spirit and charism.... the concern for them is "do I belong?" I am old enough to understand the charism. I have said yes to the particular reason that this community exists. I want to be a part of it, but am I made to feel I belong?

It is a matter of trust.

And from my recent experience in our theology community, this is very real. At least three of my students who recently left, left because they didn't feel they belonged, they didn't feel trusted, honored, taken seriously and no amount of support from me could change that loss of trust. They picked it up from the regional community. And they left. The second thought: Charism vs belonging.

So this is my framework. Now who am I? What is my background and what brings me to this topic? I am a Xaverian Missionary, who worked side by side with your community in Sierra Leone, as well as in Chicago. I returned to Sierra Leone West Africa for the third time in 1995 and got caught in the civil unrest there, returned to USA in 1999. I was in Africa 12 years. In the past I was part of FROM mission to Mission, a US network of returned missionaries who helped others return to the US after their assignments. In 2000 I was asked to take up the Theology Community of Chicago. Our

community there had 12 members last year... I was the only US confrere. There were 4 from Indonesia, 2 from DRC Congo, 2 from Cameroon, 1 from Rwanda 1 from Mexico and 1 from Italy. Our community was multicultural, our team was multicultural... Our community is one of 5 international Theologies that we have worldwide with about 70 students and formators, mixed purposely to learn to live interculturally. There are only 6 US members of our worldwide community of 820 members. The founding culture is Italian. We are fastly becoming international/cultural. It is a challenge, no doubt. So, from this varied lived experience that put me in a plethora of cultural realities, I am here at your service.

Probably, the best that I can do for you all is to share what our Formation Council did four years ago as we looked at this question of multicultural communities and charism, our present realities there in many of the CTU communities as your own, but moving to the future. We focused for the 2003-04 school year at least three of our monthly meetings on this topic and were aided by Fr. Bob Schrieter. In preparation for his coming we brainstormed some of our concerns:

1. The use and need for facilitation. When facilitation is used in a multicultural community, it sometimes seems forced... How to address the resistance of the new members to this... and how to ease the blaming or the perception of blaming of the “older white guys”...
2. It is a struggle to learn the influence of the host culture outside our door. There is prejudice with regards to multicultural living.. we want to enjoy the other, but not change... Everyone changes.... It is seldom mentioned.. Even Home changes..
3. How to move to INTERCULTURALITY from Multiculturality... and know the differences (not just being a quilt of cultures, but a new cultural reality, blended of sorts, where everyone is stretched to be more than he once was.)
4. Dialogue.... to come to a sense of security in our own faith (life) ... both groups of people are seekers..... Dialogue that moves from what is good for me and for the other... to become what is good for US.
5. It may not be so much for what we DO but to be able to THINK differently

Bob was then able to reflect together with us at a later meeting and here is some of his wisdom:

1. This is the challenge of Religious life everywhere... in 2003 he returned from a meeting in Rome of the Union of Superiors General.. His impression was that any theme leads later to the challenge of Multicultural Communities... **We need sound instincts!!!!**
2. Intercultural communication is not just for those from outside the US to adjust to us, but the **adjustment is for all**. It comes to roost in formation houses first...and then in places of ministry and community living.
3. It is more than knowledge and set of skills... we **need to look at spirituality and different ways of living**... to build it into the formation and on going formation processes... How does this new look at spirituality and different ways of living impact the Charism and Community ...? The very spirituality of the communities may give clues to better living. That is what called each member, new and old to this particular community. That was the draw.. and it is shared! ... eg. For Missionaries of the Precious Blood, **covenant** is an important theme in their spirituality. How does that look like in different cultural settings? What can bring us together around Covenant? What is it for your Spiritan Community?
4. It is important to know how to **interact and follow patterns that can assist the cultural expressions**. We all need to “listen” differently... e.g. have new and old community members talk about what was talked about in their homes, around the tables at dinner, where people sat at dinner in their homes, etc. Have them talk about how it is done at home. What was work like, in rural areas vs urban. It was mentioned to have the opportunity of “taking points” due to shared experiences that allow confreres from different cultural backgrounds to “discover” insights and things that impact them from that experience that can be the opportunity to learn the differing perspectives, histories, hurts, strengths, etc. There are a number of books by Eric Law, a Chinese American Anglican Priest whose books offer a wide variety of techniques to help in this kind of sharing. The tools are there.

5. Before Vat II we were a **collective culture in Religious life** where we worked in large numbers, large groups. After Vat II the bias was towards **individualistic cultures**, especially in the West. We need to help the younger members to move between both worlds: collective vs individualist. We need to learn to look to see what biases are operative. We may not need to change them, but we need to know them: women, laity, authority, homosexuality.... These are harder to get handle on. The Cultural Audit, that the Center for the Study of Religious Life published a few years ago may help in this regard... It helps a community articulate it's own "community culture", it helps members understand how various cultures look at, understand and use power, etc. And from that understanding, the charism is defined. Charism so often wears cultural clothing.

Let me share with you something that worked for me.

Of all the things I have read or workshops I participated in, the one thing that I think that really worked for me in helping my guys come together and "form" a new way of relating to one another was the annual trip south during some "free" days in December that we took as a group for four years. They may have been free from school, but it was work for me, intentional and good work in community building. The first year in 2000 we traveled to Atlanta GA and Florida, visiting such places as the King Center, Orlando particularly Epcot Center, Cape Canaveral, etc. The next year we did Memphis, Beal Street, St. Patrick's, the Lorraine Hotel, Elm Grove Cemetery: New Orleans, the French Quarter, Cajun country, Mulats, Vermillion Village, Lake Charles...especially through the experience of the Black Catholic community. Our short trip one year was to Springfield, IL and the Lincoln sites as well as St. Louis, MO. Our Last trip was to Oklahoma City, Santa Fe, the Cathedral, the museums, Chimayo, Chinle AZ, Our Lady of Fatima Navajo Mission Church and the Grand Canyon.

These targeted trips offered them a wider experiential context that helped them understand the US and ourselves as we traveled and lived together outside of an academic context. It showed them some very powerful examples of inculturation of the faith

(Santa Fe's cathedral and Chinle's Navajo Church). **It formed us. It confirmed us. It grounded us in a wider sense of this country and in a deeper sense of community.** We talked about the trip and all the many aspects often. **It became part of our new corporate memory**...I can't say that my provincial leadership fully supported it. Even my colleagues thought it expensive. But I deeply believed it was worth the time and money. It brought us together.

So those kinds of moments are important... like what you all are doing these days... being together, praying together, sharing issues that matter with new eyes...

The cutting edge for me is just to be much more intentional in a lot of what we do to make intercultural living a reality for our growing communities. And to discover the freshness of the Spirit, expressed in charism, that is held sacred not only by those of us who have attempted to live it for a long time, but those new members who, by God's invitation, wish to join us in this Mission. I truly believe that this is the way of the future. It is filled with grace and goodness, a divine mystery at work in our midst. It is the incarnation at its best for the present moment. Incarnation is always a NOW experience.

So, What is Mission? What is Charism? What is intercultural living? Look around, reflect, pray and be thankful. The gifts are legend.

So, the ball is now in your court. There are three questions that you can use for starters, or if there was a particular sharing of mine that caught your fancy, do feel free to use that for your prayer and our later discussion. I now invite us all to take two minutes to just let these words settle down, maybe write down the issue or idea that may have come to your mind for your sharing....

Thanks for your attention and interest. It has been an honor to be with you all today.

Questions

How has your sense of Mission Changed over the years? What things help you notice that change? What did you do to ease the change? What worked for you?

What significant multicultural relationship/moments experiences have you had in your community over the past 5 years... How has that challenged you? What have you learned from them?

What do you think your community will look like in 10 years if we have a more diverse multicultural membership? Offer 5 things that would encourage the growth of that community experience in a helpful and positive way?