

Regional Meeting

October 31, 2014

Northeast Region - New Jersey

Meeting was held at Holy Spirit Missionary Cenacle – 12 brothers were present ranging in age from 23 – 90 and come from 5 different countries / cultures. Four are in formation, three are in senior ministry

**AREAS OF UNITY AND AREAS OF CONFLICT**

During our discussion, even with the diversity of age and culture I found a deep willingness to listen, to hold one another's opinion with respect and even when there was disagreement to handle that in a way that was not childish but adult. Our house holds in the mix of confreres the wisdom and patience of those who have been at this for many, many years and the enthusiasm and freshness of those who have just beginning this journey with us.

- I. The brothers gathered all saw the Joy of the Gospel as a gift at this time to the Church and the Cenacle. Many feel a "kinship" to the themes of the Joy of the Gospel because they seem to mesh so well with our documents and charism. There was some concern around our seeming to "prioritizing" the Joy of the Gospel over our own documents and charism. For us maybe it is better to use our documents and charism as the lens with which we look – to make them primary in our thought and reflection - supported by the Joy of the Gospel.

A few themes and quotes stood out for many and spurred discussion. Joy of the Gospel #3, "I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ..." This "personal encounter" with Jesus all felt must be at the heart of all we do as ST's – it is essential – it is the source of our evangelizing joy. You cannot give what you do not have was said more than once. We felt that this invites us as individuals and as a Congregation to continue to plumb the depths of our own spirituality - to make it more our own, to make it more clear and identifiable – able to be expressed, named and shared. How can we continue to grow together through ongoing spiritual efforts? How can the congregational retreats better assist in this process? All felt this is a vital both for those in formation and for those who are the elders and are nearing the end of their active ministry – indeed all confreres. This also led us to some discussion around the content of our evangelization – that the joy of the gospel for us it is not a general move but one focused on the "preservation of the faith". Are we clear on what this calls us to? Do we still need to clarify this focus of our charism – that we work for the preservation of the faith not in a general way but specifically to preserve the Catholic faith in those areas and among those large numbers, especially young adults, who are abandoned or have lost a connection to the Church and to the faith?

- II. A second theme from our history and charism around which there was a great deal of unity was expressed in the Joy of the Gospel #15: “Indeed,, “today missionary activity still represents the greatest challenge for the Church and the missionary task must remain foremost....missionary outreach is paradigmatic for all the Church’s activity.... We cannot passively and calmly wait in our church buildings, we need to move from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry.” And #27: “ I dream of a missionary option, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything.....” All gathered in our meeting felt that this missionary outreach as paradigmatic; this missionary impulse, is at the very heart of our cenacle vocation. This called us to encourage the Congregation to continue to examine our missions – both how we do mission, where we do mission and who we invite in mission with us. There was a feeling that we need to be more bold in our mission endeavors, more spontaneous, more elastic in our ability to respond to the pressing needs of the church (recent situation in the US border and needs of the unaccompanied minors) – to be more aware of and more responsive to the “lost” of our day, especially youth and young adults, the addicted and imprisoned – more on the margins. There were questions asking where we are in our efforts at both educating our confreres and supporting efforts of systemic change? Where are we in our efforts to be bold and creative in the social justice dimensions of the Gospel – are we too sacramentally focused? Can we continue to ask the question as to whether parishes are the best vehicle to en flesh and live out our charism? In the area of who we invite in mission with us and who we share the charism with the question was raised as to why have we have stopped welcoming / inviting men from countries like Africa and India or the Phillipines? Are the Americans the limit of our charism, are we content to stop there?

One area of conflict or at least varied opinion was around the realities of our international, multi-cultural reality. Our region wants us to continue to be more intentional in dealing with the challenges and opportunities of our international and multi-cultural reality. This would entail greater sensitivity and preparation for our members as they enter into ministry in another culture or reside in one of our Cenacles that has a mix of cultures, ages, and languages. We need to continue to look for ways to “train” our cenacles to be more culturally sensitive so that all are appreciated, valued and enriched. Reference was made to some work Raul, the psychologist from the Novitiate did some years ago in several of our larger Cenacles – that was felt to be very positive and challenging.

### III. **THE REALITIES OF OUR REGION THAT ARE EMERGING – IDEAS AND HOPES**

The region is actually Holy Spirit Missionary Cenacle in Stirling so the focus regionally is actually very local. With the recent move of myself and Joe Dudek and the new vision for Stirling that we have been asked to implement there has been quite a bit of discussion and many meeting both within the house and with the lay people who frequent the Shrine - on the realities of our region as well as hopes and dreams for the future. The hopes and dreams focus on the four pillars of ministry as we move

forward: spiritual and apostolic formation, expanding the work of the peace center; ministry and programs which educate and address some of the human development and human rights issues of our day such as immigration, food security, just wage and the criminal justice system and finally expanding the recovery ministry for those suffering from addictions – a ministry begun in Baltimore and now moved to Stirling. The challenge for is how we move from a maintenance model and more traditional model of spirituality that has been the foundation of the Shrine to a missionary model – inviting all who come to have the encounter with Jesus that Francis speaks of and then to move from that personal encounter to an apostolic faith and to collaborating with us in the pillars of ministry I described above.

The Shrine and the Cenacle, as you all know, is located in a very affluent area – the challenge for our region, as we have discussed it, is how we witness to that reality as religious who are vowed to live a simple life, a common life? How do we challenge our people to embrace the call of the Joy of the Gospel – a call that invites us all to be more attentive to the poor and the marginalized and to get the smell of the sheep on us? Is the Shrine a place that we can authentically live out our call and our charism – we will have to see.

#### WHERE DID THE CONVERSATION DEAL WITH THE WHOLE CONGREGATION – WHERE DID IT FOCUS ON OUR PART OF THE VINEYARD?

This question is a bit harder to tease out because there was a flow back and forth. I think that almost each of the topics I have shared have both a communal and an individual component. We felt that none of us can sit back and expect the Congregation to tell us how to live, how to encounter Christ, how to do mission, how to live a simple, poor life - however there was a definite desire to have direction and leadership on these issues from on a Congregational level. The main areas that we discussed focused on our spirituality, our mission, our lifestyle and our international, multi cultural reality. These are not new topics but ones that we need to continue to dialogue around. One final congregational issues centered on formation. There was some expressed concern around not the content of the formation program but rather the quality of the theology that are men are learning – what is the vision of church and mission that they are leaning? What is the tenor of the theology – is it one that invites learning and questioning or is it more the teaching of dogma? Are we educating our men in a theology for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one that is equipping them for the challenges of mission and religious life in community, an education that covers the social justice dimension of our faith as sees this as integral to good education. There was an expressed fear that we are too immersed theologically in a diocesan model and not a mission model for our needs and the needs of the missionary church in our day.