

## INTERPROVINCIAL COLLABORATION

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Interprovincial collaboration maybe a phrase of recent use but its reality has been with us for a long time now.... even going back to the time of St. Vincent. Thus we hear os St. Vincent talk about *sending missionaries* to Rome (1642), to Madagascar (1646), to Poland (1661). It is true that there were no Province yet for which Interprovincial collaboration could be applied, nonetheless there were places/countries where *collaboration* was crucial for the spread of the C.M. apostolates and for the survival or theses apostolates. Thus, because of collaboration, the C.M. presence in those countries/places mentioned above was assured, survived and flourished. This reality of the past points out to all of us this undeniable truth: *that collaboration, and now interprovincial collaboration, is essential for our survival, for our growth, and also for our holiness.* One blessed (*Francis Regis Clet*) and two saints (*St. Justin and St. John Gabriel*) are witnesses of collaboration: the French with China and the Italians with Ethiopia.

While preparing for this talk, I asked the help of several Provincials with regards to their ideas and the reality of Interprovincial collaboration in their Provinces as well as in their regions. It dawned on me that what I was doing was already a case of interprovincial collaboration, more so because they immediately responded to me and gave me ideas all of which have been incorporated in this talk.

Although my presentation on interprovincial collaboration is nor exhaustive, it does aim at encouraging ourselves to share our experiences of collaboration among our Provinces as a region, as neighboring Provinces or as friendly Provinces, and for us to discuss the advantages/disadvantages, the merits and benefits as well as the problems of interprovincial collaboration. Perhaps, too, we can encourage each other to let our needs be known and allow ourselves to be inspired to meet these needs, not just from our abundance but also from our insufficiencies.

It is regrettable that there exists in our world a division between rich and poor, develop and underdeveloped countries. This sad reality in the world is also a sad reality in the C.M. world. But we can turn this sad reality into a happy reality for all of us if here and now we make a resolution that no Province should die because of poverty and other unmet needs, that no Province should disappear for lack of personnel or lack of vocations.

We must, therefore, beware of enemies of interprovincial collaboration. There are many, but I will mention only four:

1. DISUNITY - There is the story of an old man who before his death called for his sons - all ten of them.- He asked the youngest to break the stick which he was

holding and the young man broke it effortlessly. Then the old man asked the eldest to put together 10 sticks in a bunch and asked him to break it. With much effort and with all his strength he could not even bend them. And the old man told them: *“that is how I like you to*

*be*

- . The moral of the story is obvious, that is that when alone it is very easy to be broken. But when we are united, we multiply resistance and strength and nothing and no one can ever break us.

The moment we are divided by ideologies other than for which we have been established - *evangelizare pauperibus* - we will experience disunity. And with disunity interprovincial collaboration will become history.

2. ISOLATIONISM -a feeling of security, indifference, self sufficiency where we believe that we don't need anyone and no one needs us. The desire to be like an island - a rock - where we do not touch anyone and no one touches us. The need for ethnic purity. All these can lead us to isolationism and the dismissal of interprovincial collaboration.
3. FEAR OF LOSS of personnel, of resources, of identity. If we think of our Province as the world then this fear is real. But if we think of our Province as part of the bigger C.M. World, this fear will evaporate. In my limited experience of the C.M. world, I have come to these realizations:
  - a. that no Province has become poor because it helped a Province in need.
  - b. that no Province is so poor that it cannot contribute something to another Province.
  - c. that no Province is so rich that it does not need help from another Province.
4. DIFFERENCES in cultures, languages, needs, mentalities, situations, etc. These admittedly can frustrate and discourage interprovincial collaboration. For us who believe and trust in the Providence of God, for us who look up to these examples of Jesus, these differences can be overcome:
  - a. the mystery of the incarnation is a mystery of collaboration. This is God collaborating with mankind. This is God becoming man and making his dwelling among us.
  - b. the relationship of Jesus with his disciples which is a relationship of difficult collaboration in the proclamation of God's kingdom. Even the Lord complained: *“what an unbelieving and perverse lot you are! How long must I remain with you? How long can I endure you”* (Mt. 17:17). And to the apostle Philip: *“After I have been with you all this time, you still do not know me?”* (Jn. 14:9).

- c. The faith and courage of St. Vincent in sending missionaries against all odds to Madagascar, Ireland, Poland, Italy, Algiers, etc.

From the responses that I received from several Provincial Visitors, I have also come to realize that interprovincial collaboration is not just a concept, but that it is a healthy reality. This can be seen:

- a. in common internal seminaries and formation programs among neighboring provinces
- b. in the exchange of personnel
- c. in missions composed of confreres from different provinces
- d. in regional groups such as CLAPVI, COVIAM, CEVIM, Asia-Pacific Visitors Conferences, the U.S. Group of Visitors, etc.
- e. in contracts of support by the mother Province to its daughter provinces
- f. in the Vincentian organizations that make up the Vincentian Family, i.e. A.I.C., SSVP, Mariam movements, etc.

As far as apostolates are concerned, it is not uncommon to see Americans in Taiwan and South America, the Dutch in Ethiopia, the Spaniards in Cuba, the Polish in Madagascar, the Portuguese in Mozambique, the Italians in Indonesia, the Indians in Tanzania and so on. The newly formed international missions point out to us that interprovincial collaboration is working. So does the composition of the C.I.F. and even the General Curia. All are healthy signs of a dynamic interprovincial collaboration. And it is not a secret that many Provinces exist today because of sacrifices made by other Provinces.

The C.M. has had projects in the past for which again provinces responded. One such project that comes to mind was the renovation of the chapel at the motherhouse, a testimony to interprovincial collaboration, and recently I received a letter from the Visitor of the Province of the Orient - I suppose you, too, received the same letter - reminding us of the last General Assembly's resolution about maintaining the Jerusalem house. This is another matter for interprovincial collaboration, a renowned American episcopalian of the 19th century - Phillips Brooks once said: *"The ideal life is in our blood and never will still. Sad will be the day for any man when he becomes contented with the thoughts he is thinking and the deeds he is doing, where there is not for ever beating at the doors of his soul some great desire to do something larger; which he knows that he was meant and made to do"*.

Can we rest on what we already have, or can we still keep on looking for ways by which interprovincial collaboration can be further advanced and promoted? If so, here are some proposals in the forms of questions and with these I shall end my talk:

1. Are provinces with sufficient material resources and/or personnel willing to support the formation programs of provinces with a good number of vocations but without sufficient material resources and lacking in well prepared formators and professors? Corollary to this: would provinces contribute to a

common fund specifically for formation of our own; would provinces contribute to a common pool of formators/professors for our own seminaries?

2. Are provinces willing to loan, exchange personnel for other works of evangelization?
3. can the limited powers of the Superior General to call confreres for the missions be expanded for other reasons and purposes?
4. Are neighboring Provinces - especially those in the same countries - willing to join forces in order to maximize their resources and personnel for the C.M. mission?

Thank you!