

Report of the Progress of Inter-Provincial Reconfiguration in Spain

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Introduction

First of all, I would like to thank the Preparatory Commission for the Meeting of Visitors for the opportunity offered me to share with all of you, although quite briefly, the steps that we are taking in Spain in the process of the reconfiguration of the provinces.

Before beginning this subject, it seems right for me to share with you some of the history of the C.M. in Spain. The first confreres arrived in 1704 from Italy. In 1774, the Spanish province of the CM was established. In 1902, the Spanish province was divided into two: Barcelona and Madrid. In 1968, the former province of Madrid was divided into three: Madrid, Salamanca, and Zaragoza. Currently, there are four provinces in Spain with the following membership: Barcelona 39, Madrid 107, Salamanca 79, and Zaragoza 104.

The 2010 General Assembly listed among its Lines of Action the theme of “reconfiguration”. And it invited us to deepen, in local communities, provincial governing teams, provincial assemblies, and meetings, the issue of reconfiguration in the sense of “intra-provincial” and “inter-provincial”, and its importance for the future of the Congregation (2-2.1).

In an attempt to move this idea along, the Superior Ggeneral wrote a letter to the four Spanish provinces. In it, on the occasion of the 2009 provincial assemblies, he invited us to reflect on this question. Each province sent in its opinion to the Curia. Since then, there have been various meetings of provincial councils and superiors of the four provinces. The theme was discussed in those meetings.

On the occasion of the 2012 provincial assemblies, the superior general wrote a letter again to all the confreres of the four CM provinces in Spain (12 December 2011), laying out the theme of reconfiguration. In this letter, he invited us to proceed with a reflection and he asked our consultation on reconfiguration toward a real union of the provinces: “Are you in favor of reconfiguration, leading to a real union of the provinces of the Congregation of the Mission in Spain? In domestic assemblies, the confreres can declare whether they are in favor or not; the provincial assemblies should decide”.

Toward a new reconfiguration for creative fidelity to the Mission

This was the common theme of the provincial assemblies of Barcelona, Madrid, and Salamanca. It had been formulated previously in a joint Superiors' Meeting. It had also been agreed to hold our provincial assemblies on the same dates (24-29 June 2012) and in the same place (Salamanca).

An inter-provincial commission was charged with preparing a single *"Instrumentum laboris"* for the three provinces. Then, with the responses of the three provinces, a working document was also drawn up for the members of the assemblies of the three provinces.

To begin with the question posed by the Superior General in his letter, we decided unanimously in the assemblies, as did each province individually, to begin this process of the union of the provinces. The province of Zaragoza treated this question in its provincial assembly, but it did not agree to the union of the provinces, going on record to follow the path of inter-provincial collaboration. This is why, in this process, only three Spanish provinces began, and not four.

Specific actions to continue the process

In the Superior General's letter mentioned previously, he asked us, if we came out in favor: "What specific actions will be needed to continue the process of reconfiguration toward a real union of the provinces, taking into account what has already been done until now?"

How to proceed, with specific actions, would from then on be the major theme of our assemblies, once declared ourselves in favor of reconfiguration. All our works will now be directed toward this end, and the activities of the assemblies would be summarized in a broad and well defined "final document" entitled:

"Toward a new reconfiguration for creative fidelity to the Mission: final document of the provincial assemblies in response to the consultation of the Superior General by the canonical Provinces of Barcelona-Madrid-Salamanca".

Final document of the provincial assemblies

This document lists those aspects which we must not miss for reconfiguration to be a success. Allow me now, briefly, to assemble the main parts and some of the more important ideas.

Reconfiguration: its meaning and basis

By "reconfiguration" we understand the internal transformation of each province, moved from within itself, toward choosing a new kind of presence of the Congregation in Spain, as demanded by fidelity to

its end. In this document, we mentioned reconfiguration as a profound transformation (a structural change). This will go beyond mere inter-provincial collaboration. It is based on a spiritual process. It cannot be completed without a determined choice for the continual renewal (*metanoia*) of all the confreres. God is offering us this opportunity to revive our proper spirit, and to offer quality evangelization and an effective realization of the Kingdom of God among the poor. Evidently, too, this is demanded by reality: the smaller number of confreres in our provinces.

Goal of reconfiguration

- a) *Pastoral Plan for evangelization in the new province.* This has to include our common feeling, desire, concern; the road to follow; and the dynamism for a new way of being in the Church and in the world.
- b) *A new province of the Congregation in Spain.* 82% of the confreres in the domestic assemblies declared themselves in favor of the union of the provinces. The deputies of the provincial assemblies also declared themselves in favor by 87%. This supposes that once the 2016 general assembly is over, on the date that the 2015 provincial assemblies approve (27/09/2016 or 25/01/2017), the Superior General will erect a new canonical province in Spain. We are already looking for a name and a location for the “new child”.

Goal, inspirational principles, and lines of Action

The goal is to revitalize the life and the mission of the Congregation of the Mission in Spain today, by placing our manpower and resources in the service of the evangelization of the poor, according to our charism, and being more meaningful in the places where we are located. The inspirational principles are: faithfulness to the Gospel and to the charism of Saint Vincent, faithfulness to the end of the C.M., faithfulness to mankind and to the signs of the time, and faithfulness to our own vocation. The lines of Action: Vincentian identity, missionary community, and the mission of evangelization.

Activities and procedures leading to reconfiguration

Various activities were mentioned concerning understanding, sensitizing, and conversion. Directions were also indicated about how to draw up a new “Pastoral Plan for Evangelization”, and various activities were mentioned, and a direction toward a new province of the C.M. in Spain. In the following section, I will summarize the more concrete steps that we have taken up to now.

Our direction up to the assemblies of June 2013

We decided that 29 October 2012 would be the official start of this process. In Madrid, the three provincials met along with the superior general and the vicar general. Also, the visitors of Zaragoza and Portugal were present as guests. In this meeting, we named an "Inter-provincial Commission", composed of one confrere from each province, responsible for studying the process: provincial realities, main lines, directions to follow, elaborating the Pastoral Plan for Evangelization of the new province. Also, a secretary was named for the meeting of the councils.

In this same session, the Superior General was asked to name a delegate. After a few days, Fr. Gregory responded that it would be Fr. Javier Álvarez, vicar general, who should "accompany and animate the process of reconfiguration. In this way, a link with the general council would be maintained. The delegate will be asked to know and accompany the entire process, as much as possible, in the most important meetings, and to move the process along, for whatever reason, if it is blocked" (exerpt from Letter of 23 November, to Visitors and Councils).

On 14 February 2013, the three provincial councils met again. Following the proposals of the coordinating commission, we took steps to agree on a "road map", to approve a questionnaire to be sent to each confrere, and to finalize the various commissions to be established. On 10 April, the three visitors met with the members of the coordinating commission to review the process.

Commissions to accompany the process

Besides the coordinating commission, other commissions were established and their responsibilities were specified:

Formation Commission: to draw up a project for initial and ongoing formation for the new province. This commission has already drawn up four papers which have been worked on in each of our communities. Their titles are: 1) "Eyes to see and a heart to feel", 2) "Be what we are called to be", 3) "With our own style", 4) "Community for the mission". Three meetings were also organized concerning sensitizing and understanding, plus formation, held for two days, so that the confreres might be able to take part in one of the three of them. The themes are: "Seeing the world as evangelizers of the poor", and "Evangelization of the poor and Vincentian identity".

Evangelization Commission: A study of the current situation, understanding activities and resources, proposing new forms of apostolate, identifying pastoral priorities, etc. And, organizing meetings of the confreres.

Social Communication Commission: On unifying our web pages, provincial bulletins, publishing houses, etc.

Commission on legal matters and provincial norms: To draw up new provincial norms and to specify the transition phase and the structure of the new province.

Finance Commission: To unify our accounting procedures, to specify the patrimony of the provinces, and to have an audit of each of them.

Recently, the three provincial councils met in Barcelona on 8 May to study common criteria for the revision of our ministries and presence. Now, I want to conclude with the "Prayer for this time of reconfiguration", prepared by the coordinating commission, and which is being said in all our communities:

Lord, you have set before us the challenge of reconfiguring the missionary activity of our provinces. This places us in a time of reflection and deepening of our Vincentian vocation. Grant us the strength and the inspiration needed to know how to respond to the current demands of evangelization and service to those who are most in need. May your Spirit be with us to enlighten us in the process, that we may live it out as your gift and our task. Amen.

Translated from Spanish by CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.