

EYMARDIAN FAMILY

SSS INTERNATIONAL



N. 340 - 22/01/2025

Curia Generalizia SSS, Via G.B. de Rossi, 46 - 00161 Roma - Italia - www.ssscgregatio.org

For an enriching experience of Internationality within the community

On 5 and 6 December last, a meeting on Internationality took place, on the initiative of our Vicar General, Fr Anaclet Bambala, in reference to the desire of the 36th General Chapter to materialise internationality in our Congregation. Following this meeting, Fr Anicet Kapita shares his thoughts with us.

Introduction

Internationality is a topical issue for many social and religious organisations. It is the subject of study, reflection and renewal at the heart of humanity. Religious families are not standing on the fringes apropos this issue.

The Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament in its final message of the 36th General Chapter, states: "Internationality enables all the members of the Congregation to appreciate the opportunities, difficulties and challenges we face as a shared reality within the charismatic family. Internationality enriches experience,

knowledge and diversity... As internationality encourages and promotes unity within the Congregation, we reaffirm that the Eucharist is a true sacrament of unity, enabling fellowship among people and communion between brothers (ROL #8). To live and commit ourselves to the path of internationality as a congregation, with the Eucharist at the center of its life is to affirm forcefully that to live by the Eucharist is to denounce division, dispersion and opposition, and to promote friendship, communion and unity. Internationality urges us to widen the space of your tent (cf. Is 54:2), in the spirit of a "church on the move" according to Pope Francis".

From this point of view, internationality is of paramount importance and, in the light of our Founder's "gift of self", becomes a leitmotif for our religious family and an effective instrument for our mission.

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What is Internationality?

At the end of the 36th General Chapter, on the occasion of the celebration of the 40th anniversary of our charismatic heritage (*Rule of Life*), with the celebration of the Synod and the Jubilee Year, it is appropriate for us religious of the Blessed Sacrament to redefine this concept in the light of our Founder, the Apostle of the Eucharist.

We cannot give an apodictic definition of the concept because it is not abstract but real. In other words, internationality is not theoretical but practical. It is lived. Internationality refers to the broader, holistic dimension involving several nations and cultures in a given context. The term therefore emphasises the global or transnational nature of a situation. Referring to this issue at a meeting, Father Fiorenzo Salvi, former Superior General, noted that **internationality is defined in the life and current reality of the Congregation and that it is the ideal place to respond to our questions based on the Eucharist.**

The definition of internationality is not the same for everyone. However, our reflections contribute to the construction of a common vision of this concept, with the aim of deepening it to respond to our charism today.

The concept of internationality in the life of the Founder

In the light of the Founder's journey, we believe that he had the desire to live internationally. Father Eymard's international dimension is prefigured by the mission that he entrusts to us of setting the world on fire with the Eucharistic flame. In this way, we could say that Saint Peter-Julian Eymard himself wanted to experience internationality with this idea in mind: may your Community be strengthened, grow, and carry the divine fire to the four corners of the world (PR 107,3).

The different challenges of internationality

In this context, we will explore some of the specific challenges of internationality within a community. Although these reflections do not claim to cover all situations or to be unanimous, they do aim to identify ways of overcoming these obstacles and promoting a fraternal community.

a) Experiencing true brotherhood and feeling like a brother among brothers

This challenge echoes Saint Peter-Julian Eymard's vision of how his religious were called to live the mystery of the Cenacle. For him, the Cenacle was not just a historical or symbolic place, but a way of life to be embodied in daily life. This vision is based on a deep and archetypal understanding of the community as a spiritual family. The Cenacle thus becomes the setting where everyone is called to live out Eucharistic values: welcome, mutual trust, a sense of belonging, and emotional and spiritual security. These dimensions are all concrete expressions of this love that transcends differences to reflect communion.

According to the *Rule of Life* (RL n° 6 and 7), this community dynamic aims to establish sincere and reciprocal care between all the members, based on a relationship of evangelical love and disinterested service. The life of the Cenacle, as desired by Eymard, is not limited to harmonious coexistence, but invites each member to contribute actively to building a community rooted in the Eucharist.

b) The challenge of culturality

No culture is superior to another. Culture is a value to be preserved, transmitted and taught. In the process of internationality, the cultural value assimilated by a way of living together, which very often in terms of form, takes most of its practices from the culture of the environment. These practical elements can be language, food, etc. The enrichment of this local culture by the practices of different identities would respond to Saint Paul's exhortation to the Galatians (Galatians 3:28ff).

c) Sharing community meals: a symbol of unity

In international communities, tensions over food, often rooted in cultural or religious differences, can arise and be a source of division. The question to be explored in this challenge is: in an international community, what food could be suitable and unanimously accepted by all members, thus promoting communal harmony? Faced with these challenges, a collective and spiritual approach, inspired by the Council of Jerusalem, can help to overcome them: "We and the Holy Spirit have decided not to impose on you any burdens other than these indispensable ones...". (Acts 15: 28-29).

Indeed, in the spirituality of the Cenacle, food, like Eucharistic communion, is a bond of harmony between the members. It is a model of synodality that makes it possible to resolve tensions in humility and fraternity through dialogue: "Every day, with one heart, they frequented the Temple diligently; they broke bread in their houses, taking their food with joy and simplicity of heart" (Acts 2, 46-47).

d) The reference challenge

In our specific case, the communities described as international bring together members who are sent by different Provinces and are placed under the responsibility either of the Conference or of the General Curia. In practice, however, this raises concrete problems with regard to the point of reference. In this kind of situation, one or other member can dispense with obedience to the local superior because of referring directly to his major superior of origin. I think it would be preferable to clearly define the question of reference in order to avoid being under two-heads, which often generates tensions and makes it difficult for the local superior to exercise his powers.

Conclusion

Internationality is a complex reality. However, it is best understood in the context of one's own spiritual heritage (Charism). The religious of the Blessed Sacrament live the experience of internationality in their religious belonging to the Eymardian Family which welcomes them.

There are two types of international experience that our family faces: *internationality ad extra and internationality ad intra*. The two themes take us back to the concept of the twofold reality of being "disciple-apostle". The first refers to the experience of internationality in the encounter with other cultures, and the second to the way in which we live this experience with the others who come to us.

In short, internationality among the Blessed Sacrament religious is a gift and an opportunity to set the Eucharistic fire alight in the world, as our holy Founder desired. It demands of us a great openness, which is the acceptance of others. True fraternity consists in living communion and unity as sons and daughters of the same family, sharing the same life project. Our religious family has every interest in becoming aware of this reality of internationality at all levels of life. We are invited to prepare and educate ourselves for internationality.

12 December 2024

Father Anicet Kapita, sss
Superior
Canadian Martyrs Community, Rome

