

Inter-generational Dialogue: Towards Building Synergy in Consecrated Life in Nigeria

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Preamble

I was invited to lead a discussion on the above topic; and I must start by expressing my appreciation to the two secretaries of our respective conferences for this singular honour. To be invited to address any audience is always a privilege; what more to be invited to address a community of women and men who have dedicated their entire life totally to the cause of living the evangelical virtues together and in the service of the Church and their brothers and sisters. I am very grateful for the invitation and feel highly honoured. However, my prevailing circumstances could not allow me sufficient time to develop a technical paper on this all important a topic. All I will go ahead to do here is to provide some framework for our discussion on how we could exploit the diversity among the generations in our membership to enhance our effective witness as those who have chosen the consecrated life in today's Nigeria.

Introduction

We are living in a very challenging and interesting period. The 21st century man and woman insist that she/he is living in an altogether

historical situation, living an original human experience. The novelty of experience is such that it is claimed that the perennial wisdom and morality of the past no longer apply. As distinct from past mentalities, contemporary ideology stresses the mass aspect of things. It is an era of mass communication, mass travel, mass education, mass entertainment and even mass murder. The conventional wisdom exalts personal profit over the common good, money over virtue, and power over service to others. The defeat of reason, the mass culture and the frenzy of self-fulfilment create a further characteristic of the contemporary world. In such a world, the task of living a life of evangelical counsels of Chastity, Poverty and Obedience, a life that is fully God-centred, is, indeed no walk in the park. The consecrated life and indeed, Christianity lived to the fullest involves struggle.

This struggle is even more compounded by the nature of our calling. We witness at the same time both an intense desire for an improved quality of communal life and at the same time a sense of fear or resistance surrounding it. Those embracing the consecrated life today are very much influenced by the post-modern radical individualism, selfie culture, excessive use of social media, etc. But at the same time, we find in them also a hunger for meaningful community. So, we are caught up in this ambivalence and it is also reflected in the quality of life we live as members of the consecrated life in the present time. Many begin to question the relationship between community life and mission, their relevance and importance. A lot of energy is spent in questions of power and authority in the community and members find the exercise frustrating as the quality of their participation in the apostolic work suffers.¹

¹Antony Bhyju, “Religious Community – A Place for Becoming Real Brothers and Sisters (Formation for Fraternal Life in Community)”, in *Sayansa, Journal of Consecrated Life*, vol. XII, no. 2. July–December 2017, 187-204 (187).

All these make our gathering very relevant and our topic very timely. Following a brief discussion on the identity and relevance of the consecrated life, I will touch on intergenerational dialogue and allied concepts, and end with concrete suggestions on how these could be deployed in promoting synergy in the consecrated life.

Understanding Consecrated Life and Living

Consecrated life is a form of life within the Church wherein members profess vows of chastity, poverty and obedience within a congregation approved by the Church. According to the 1983 Code of Canon Law, it is a stable form of living by which the faithful, following Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, are totally dedicated to God who is loved most of all, so that, having dedicated themselves to His honour, to the building up of the Church and to the salvation of the world, they strive for the perfection of charity in service to the Kingdom of God.² In professing these vows and living within community, the members individually and as a whole witness to a life of communion with Christ, the Church, and one another.

Fraternal Life as the Essence of the Consecrated Life

An integral part of the consecrated life is shared community life. In the words Saint Pope John Paul II: “The effectiveness of religious life depends on the quality of the fraternal life in common. Even more so, the current renewal in the Church and in religious life is characterised by a search for communion and community”.³ These flows from the realisation that in seeking God, no one is self-sufficient. Rather, we are called, in the light of faith, to move beyond self-centredness, drawn by

²Can 573, par 1.

³ John Paul II, Address to Plenary Session of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Nov. 20, 1992, No. 3 in *L'Osservatore Romano* (English ed.), Dec. 2, 1992.

God's Holy Face and by the "sacred ground of the other",⁴ to an ever more profound experience of communion.⁵ So understood, fraternal communion is a reflection of God's own way of being and bestowing himself; it testifies to the fact that "God is love" (*1Jn* 4:8, 16). Members of the consecrated life profess to believe in, and live by, the love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The community of brothers and sisters thus becomes a graced reflection of the God who is a Trinity of Love.

Over and above the bond of our Baptism which joins them to their Christian brothers and sisters in a sacramental way, we, as members of the consecrated life, are bonded together into a special cultic fraternity or sorority thanks to our commitments to live the vows together in a community. There is here a convergence of "yeses" to God which unites us into one single community of life. Consecrated together -- united in the same "yes", united in the Holy Spirit – we discover every day that our following of Christ "obedient, poor and chaste", is lived in fraternity, as was the case with the disciples who followed Jesus in his ministry. We are united in the mission to oppose prophetically the idolatry of power, of possession and of pleasure. We are living witnesses to the fact that God's love calls us to go beyond blood relationships, ethnicity, and nationality, to be brothers and sisters to all.

Because our communities are made of ordinary human beings who are often limited, fragile and broken, it is natural that some difficulties arise while living together in communities. We have not chosen our companions. They were given to us. We experience how difficult it is to create harmony among us always. The story is told of a group of monks who were asked, from a human perspective, what was the most

⁴ Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 169: AAS 105 (2013), 1091.

⁵ Pope Francis, *Apostolic Constitution Vultum Dei Quarere, On Women's Contemplative Life*, no. 1.

gratifying aspect of their lives. They answered almost to the man: the common life with our brothers. They were then asked to name the most difficult aspect of monastic life; and the answer, not surprisingly, was the same: the common life with our brothers. If there is a cross in living alone, there is clearly a cross to be carried in living among others.

As a brotherhood and sisterhood “where the daily and patient passage from 'me' to 'us' takes place”,⁶ fraternal life in a community offers a golden opportunity to consecrated persons to learn how to be faithful to the Lord and to one another in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, to love and honour all their brothers and sisters until death physically separates them.⁷ Such faithfulness always implies being open to one another and calls for sharing “the joys and sorrows, the concerns and successes of other members”. It becomes, in the beautiful words the Document *Fraternal Life in Community* “*Schola Amoris*, a School of Love, for young people and for adults — a school in which all learn to love God, to love the brothers and sisters with whom they live, and to love humanity, which is in great need of God's mercy and of fraternal solidarity”.⁸

The Relevance of the Consecrated Life in the Society

Irrespective of the context of the diverse cultures and societies of our planet, wounded as we are, by divisive forces of passion and conflicting interests, there exists at the same time a yearning for unity. In such a context, consecrated living in a community clearly demonstrates that life in common is both possible and fulfilling (cf. *Ps* 133:1), despite differences of age, education and even culture. Living

⁶ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL), *Fraternal Life in Community* (Vatican, 1994), 39.

⁷ CICLSAL, Instruction *Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium* 1. 30.

⁸ CICLSAL, *Fraternal life*, 25.

together in their various communities, consecrated persons show the way as it brings together people of different ages, languages and cultures who meet as brothers and sisters and remain united despite the inevitable conflicts and difficulties inherent in common life. When we do not succeed in bearing the cross of living among others, our communities become mere houses of indifference or even battle fields, where what we do, they become real symbols of a better world to come.⁹ They become signs that bear “witness to a higher reality and points to higher aspirations”.¹⁰ They become a prophetic “sign” in this our time when consumerism feeds the logic of individualism and the “culture of fragmentation,”¹¹ and the throw-away logic extends to every sphere of existence: to the unborn, to the elderly, to those least able to contribute to the economy.¹²

Consecrated Life Exists for Mission

Consecrated life does not exist for itself. It is the means to reach the end, i.e., mission. In other words, without communities in mission or shaped by mission, our institutes and our various institutes lose their very reason of being and they become conflictual fields and areas of protection of all kinds of individualism. A religious community must strive to become a “visible and concrete manifestation of the communion which is the foundation of the Church and at the same time, a prophecy of that unity towards which she tends as her final goal.”¹³ Pope Saint John Paul II so much insisted on the profound mutual interconnection between communion and mission that for him

⁹ Jose Cristo Garcia Paredes, “Communion and Love-Shaped Communities: Biblical Inspiration”, in *Sanyasa*, 127-142 (128).

¹⁰ CICALSAL, *Fraternal Life*, 56

¹¹ Pope Francis, “Address to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life,” 2017.

¹² Michael Czerny, “Religious Life from Vatican II to Fratelli Tutti” in *Review for Religious: New Series*, Volume 1, Issue 1, Summer 2021, pp. 87-106 (102)

¹³ CICALSAL, *Fraternal Life in Community*, Rome 1994

the two must “interpenetrate and mutually imply each other to the point that communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: Communion gives rise to mission, and mission is accomplished in communion”.¹⁴ In his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, he speaks of “communion for mission” and “mission for communion” and insists that communion and mission should go hand in hand.¹⁵

For this reason, the major thrust of a religious community cannot be creation of structures, rules and regulations or insistence on laws. Neither can it be simply a community-centeredness, nor a levelling collectively without dynamism or inspiration where the emphasis is on “being in community” and neglect evangelical responsiveness to the world around. Religious communities cannot also be “task-oriented companies” or action-oriented corporate presence, like multi-national corporations where work and efficiency in execution are the prime values. Wherever work is important, activism can dominate, and individuals could be sacrificed to the fulfilment of the work. Members can slip into careerism and professionalism, driven by cravings for status, power, glory and reputation.¹⁶

The challenge facing us today is how our institutes, communities and persons may be transformed into missional congregations, communities and persons; and how to move from religious institutes shaping missions to being mission-shaped religious institutes.¹⁷ The changing cultural atmosphere we are living, constitutes for us a call from God. They present a moment of opportunity, a challenge to confidence in the gospel, and a call to imaginative mission. It must accommodate the cultural and spiritual diversity of its members,

¹⁴ John Paul, *Christifideles Laici*, 32.

¹⁵ John Paul, *Ecclesia in Asia*, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, n. 24).

¹⁶ Xavier E. Manavath, “Founders' Missionary Vision: The Essence of a Religious Community, in *Sanyasa* 155-167 (160).

¹⁷ CISLSAL, *Fraternal Life in Community*, n. 54

knowing that community life itself is a mission. The vision of seeing the community as the first act of mission is an important missiological orientation for every consecrated person. Thus, to be a community is not just a substantive or noun, but it is a verb- an action, a collective responsibility that creates an eschatological witnessing which flourishes in our diversity because of the basic openness to dialogue and seek the truth together. Today more than before, consecrated life is challenged with an opportunity and a very special task: that of creating, inspiring, enlivening and sustaining everywhere *authentic fraternal communities* that radiate friendship, encouragement, support and reconciliation. It must put all its efforts to strengthen community life, to which new generations are very sensitive. And this is where intergenerational dialogue is called for.

Intergenerality: The Meaning

Intergenerationally – literally relating to, involving or affecting generations – is the interaction between members of different generations that centres on the concept or idea of fairness or justice in relationships between children, youth, adults and seniors, particularly in terms of treatment and interactions. According to social identity theory, people generally seek to classify themselves and others based on perceived similarities and differences. Therefore, individuals may seek to classify themselves as belonging to a particular generation because they perceive oneness with traits popularly associated with other members of the group and classify others into separate “out-groups” based on dissimilar characteristic. Among the most common generational classifications today include the 'Traditionalists (1926 – 1945)', 'Baby Boomers (1946 – 1965)', 'Gen-Xers (1966 – 1980)', 'Millennials (1981 – 2000)', and 'Gen-Zers (2001 – 2015)'. As individuals create in- and out-groups from generational identities, interactions between members can be impacted and conflict can

occur.¹⁸ This bias between generations occurs because of the human need to belong to a social group to provide a sense of social identity, pride, and self-esteem, but may also create stereotypes about those in different social groups, which may be generations.¹⁹ In the African sense, we have age groups and classification into different groups especially with the paradigm of age and sometimes gender. What kind of relationship (both inter and intra) exists between these groups? What is the basis of the interaction? Is it subordinate, passive and receptive or an active, mutual recognition of capacity and importance? These are important questions to ponder upon.

Intergenerational Solidarity

This refers to the degree of closeness and support between different generations. It is based on the recognition that different generations have unique competencies and knowledge that can be the subject of conversation in partnership -building; and the recognition that different generations are key stakeholders in the development of the society (social impact and integration) and it is only through working together productively and respectfully that the system can leverage on their contributions.

Intergenerational synergy or solidarity is a model that enables the interaction of different generations for the mutual benefit of the different generations.²⁰ At the heart of it is a sense of mission and

¹⁸ Urick, Michael J.; Hollensbe, Elaine C.; Masterson, Suzanne S.; Lyons, Sean T. (2017-04-01). "Understanding and managing Intergenerational Conflict: An Examination of Influences and Startegies". *Work, Aging and Retirement*, 3(2): 166-185. ISSN: 2054-4642 [doi:10.1093/workar/waw009](https://doi.org/10.1093/workar/waw009).

¹⁹ "Social Identity Theory; Simply Psychology" Retrieved 2020-11-06 from www.simplypsychology.org

²⁰ Towards Harnessing Intergenerational Opportunities for Inclusive Growth and Devt in Nigeria, *Being the text of the 10th Convocation Lecture delivered by Olanrewaju A. Fagbohun SAN, Professor of Environmental Law & 8th Vice Chancellor of the Lagos State University, at the Osun State University, Osogbo on Tuesday September 21, 2021 published in This Day, Monday, 5th December, 2022; <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/10/04/towards-harnessing-intergenerational-opportunities-for-inclusive-growth-and-devt-in-nigeria>/accessed December 5, 2022*

purpose: to move away from the current paradigm which provides limited opportunities for interaction between generations to a setting which provides limitless opportunities for interaction, and which in turn results in better physical and mental health for the older generation, ability to learn and grow for the younger generation, and higher levels of satisfaction for all generations. The participation of the older generations will, among others, help to deepen understanding of best practices and the historical challenges of the sector, particularly in the face of climate change. The younger generations on their part, will bring to bear innovative technologies that will improve efficiency and give competitive advantage for the benefit of all. When there is a synergy of these attributes between the old and the young in the consecrated life, living together in communities would become a better place. The most successful communities are those in which the individual *gifts* of the members are identified, affirmed, and utilized. Such communities experience among other things the growth of the individuals, the improvement of community life, and the effectiveness of the ministry.²¹

Intergenerational Conflict

An intergenerational conflict is either a conflict situation between teenagers and adults or a more abstract conflict between two generations, which often involves all-inclusive prejudices against another generation. This is a term describing one generation that, contrary to the will of another, will not help the other generation and makes it difficult for the other generation to act.²² Intergenerational

²¹ Bhyju, "Religious Community, 199

²² Klimczuk, Andrzej, *Intergenerationality, Intergenerational Justice, Intergenerational Policies*, [in:] S. Thompson (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Diversity and Social Justice*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham 2015, pp. 419-423; Lüscher, Kurt, Hoff, Andreas, Klimczuk, Andrzej, Lamura, Giovanni, Renzi, Marta, Oliveira, Paulo d.S., Sánchez, Mariano, Viry, Gil, Widmer, Eric, Neményi, Ágnes, Veress, Enik , Bjursell, Cecilia, Boström, Ann-Kristin, Rapolien , Gražina, Mikulionien , Sarmit , O lak, Sema, Canatan, Ay e, Vujovi , Ana, Svetelšek, Ajda, Gavranovi , Nedim, Ivashchenko, Olga, Shipovskaya, Valentina, Lin, Qing, Wang, Xiyiing, [Generations, intergenerational relationships, generational policy. A multilingual compendium - Edition 2017](#), Universität Konstanz, Konstanz 2017

conflict also describes cultural, social, or economic discrepancies between generations, which may be caused by shifts in values or conflicts of interest between younger and older generations. It is associated with the term “generation gap”.

Conflict of any type is an extremely difficult issue for most people living in the community. It can lead to communities to become stuck and to the development of tensions among community members. Conflict, however, is necessary for without it, the community will not grow. Conflict is productive only when it is resolved. The development of the community also depends on how they deal with *conflicts*. Communities develop only when the people involved have the willingness and capacity to deal with conflict. Until the members develop a greater comfort and confidence in dealing with conflict, communities are condemned to stagnation. The task of formators and superiors is to encourage the members to address the conflict.²³

Intergenerational Policy

For intergenerational solidarity to be achieved, there must be deliberate policies and law, educational activities that can dispel misconceptions between generations and more intergenerational contact activities. An intergenerational policy is a public policy that incorporates an intergenerational approach to addressing an issue or has an impact across the generations. These policies can be targeted to increase age integration by facilitating interaction between people of different age groups by supporting physical proximity, developing common interests, or by other mechanisms. The purpose of integration is to eliminate social barriers and difficulties associated with age, including discrimination on the grounds of age. These policies contain specific

²³Bhyju, “Religious Community”, 193

programs and actions aimed at supporting simultaneous participation of children, youth, and older adults.²⁴

Drivers of Intergenerational Collaboration

The followings could be identified as the main reason why it is necessary for us as Religious Institutes to promote intergenerational synergy among us through targeted policies:

- To meet the challenge of rising longevity, loneliness, and social exclusion which has resulted in older adults having to depend on the support of younger generations for longer period.
- To meet the growing digital divide challenge in the way it is separating generations.
- Enhance increase of understanding of others in ways that help to remove/reduce negative stereotypes.
- Support the development of new skills and competencies.
- The recognition that different generations have unique competencies and knowledge that can be the subject of conversation in partnership -building; and
- The recognition that different generations are key stakeholders in the development of the society (social impact and integration) and it is only through working together productively and respectfully that the system can leverage on their contributions.

²⁴ Generations United. (2010) "[Guiding Principles Archived 2008-08-20 at the Wayback Machine](#)"

Concrete Ways of Promoting Intergenerational Synergy

Most of the proposals here are adopted from Pope Francis, among the greatest advocates of the need for intergeneration synergy in the Church today. Especially in his *Fratelli Tutti*, Francis recommends to everyone, but especially to consecrated persons the followings as tools for promoting synergy across the generations:

1. *The Use of Dialogue*

Dialogue is a means of seeking the truth together and knowing it in its effective objectivity, overcoming every kind of “appropriation” that limits it to a single point of view.²⁵ Since from its nature, the consecrated community is the result of the Trinity - the perennial example of a perfect dialogue of love - the fraternity also is essentially embedded, formed, and led to grow in a loving dialogue. "Dialogue in charity" is invaluable in the endeavour of weaving the bonds of communion. A Gospel fraternity cannot live without dialogue.²⁶ By their calling, consecrated people are essentially ordered to be experts of communion and dialogue.²⁷ From their lives they know that when they let their differences co-exist and converge in harmony, communion becomes possible.

It is therefore necessary to have ongoing formation on the issue of intergenerational dialogue to strengthen the charism of brotherhood and sisterhood in consecrated life. A sensible and well-planned ongoing formation does make dialogue among the different generations easier and aiding in overcoming some of the unavoidable problems and crises arising with advancing age. To put it short,

²⁵ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 206.

²⁶ John Paul II encapsulates this concept by affirming that "The consecrated life, by the very fact that it promotes the value of fraternal life, provides a privileged experience of dialogue," *Vita Consecrata*, 74.

²⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 10.

dialogue is one of the principal means for ongoing formation. It is one of the essential requirements for an effective formation process which tends to encourage and enable the building up of a fraternity. Dialogue facilitates members to freely share their joys and sorrows with one another; thus developing a deep and committed affective life among themselves. Since the fundamental technique of formation in Consecrated life is brotherhood and sisterhood, a productive and caring dialogue between the younger and older members does not only inspire fraternal living with one another but also makes them available for mission.

2. Promotion of Mutual Respect and Kindness

Kindness is as an attitude of respect, respecting “other people's right to be themselves and to be different”²⁸ and “concern not to offend by word or deed”.²⁹ Reciprocity of respect based on the common dignity of everyone should be the focus in the allocation of areas of apostolate or mission or spirituality of the community rather than on who is what and who is old or young.

3. Sincere and Honest Interaction among Members.

This involves learning neither to impose one's own opinions nor to undervalue those of others.³⁰ For this to be achieved, all members must see themselves as builders of community and not simply recipients of its eventual benefits. A community exists inasmuch as it comes about and is built up by the contribution of all, each according to his or her gifts, through the development of a strong spirituality of communion whereby all experience a sense of belonging.³¹ Only in this way can life in community provide its members with the mutual assistance needed

²⁸ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 218.

²⁹ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 223.

³⁰ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 224

³¹ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 43: *AAS* 93 (2001), 296-297.

to live their vocation to the full.³² Here the following words Pope Francis addressed to a group of nuns in contemplative life should be borne in mind:

You who have embraced the monastic life must never forget that today's men and women expect you to bear witness to an authentic fraternal communion that, in a society marked by divisions and inequality, clearly demonstrates that life in common is both possible and fulfilling (cf. *Ps* 133:1), despite differences of age, education and even culture. Your communities ought to be credible signs that these differences, far from being an obstacle to fraternal life, actually enrich it. Remember that unity and communion are not the same as uniformity, and are nourished by dialogue, sharing, mutual assistance and profound compassion, especially towards the most frail and needy.³³

4. *Conscious Attempts at Promoting more Intergenerational Communication*

Communication is an essential aspect of life as brothers and sisters in community, a practical horizon in which to exercise the evangelical style of relating to others. Understood as “a mutual exchange of information and understanding by any effective means,”³⁴ communication has been recognized as one of the human factors acquiring increased importance for the life of a religious community. Communication entails clear message from the sender and to the receiver. The deeply felt need to enhance fraternal life in community is accompanied by a corresponding need for communication which is both fuller and more intense. Whereas good communication builds communion and brings peace, harmony, progress and unity among the people;³⁶ poor communication brings misunderstanding, frustrations

³² Cf. Second Vatican ecumenical council, Decree *Perfectae Caritatis*, 15; *Code of Canon Law*, can. 602.

³³ Francis, *Vultum Dei Quarere*, 26.

³⁴ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 53, 199.

³⁵ Anthony, D'Souza, *Leadership* (Nairobi: Pauline 1994), 119.

³⁶ G. Kaitholil, “*Communion in Community*” *A Renewal Programme for Religious* (Bandra, Mumbai: Pauline Publication, 2003), 44.

and disunity in the lives of the people and it could prevent effective development.³⁷

Today, thank God, communication within institutes has developed considerably. There are a growing number of regular meetings of members at different levels, central, regional, and provincial; superiors often send letters and suggestions, and their visits to communities are more frequent. The publication of newsletters and internal periodicals is more widespread. Regular meetings at the community level, often on a weekly basis, have also proved very useful; they let members share problems concerning the community, the institute, the Church, and in relation to the Church's major documents. They provide opportunities to listen to others, share one's own thoughts, review and evaluate past experiences, and think and plan together. Such meetings are particularly necessary for the growth and development of fraternal life, especially in larger communities. Time must be set aside for this purpose and kept free from all other engagements. We only need to deploy this good development to the promotion of intergeneration synergy.

5. Institutionalising Intergeneration Synergy in Constitutions

There should an intentionality about building the intergenerational synergy within consecrated life. This must clearly be spelt out by the leadership, and if possible, it should be enshrined in the constitution and should be reflected in the composition of the Council. This calls for more flexibility regarding the structures of our community. We should evolve structures of the communities (time schedule, rules and norms of community living, leadership models and styles of governance) that

³⁷ Juliet Chikaodinaka Ogbodo, *Healthy Community Living: An Examination of Factors that Enhance Communal Living in Consecrated Life Among the Carmelite Missionaries, Nairobi Kenya: An Integration Paper Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of Requirement for Certificate in Spirituality at Tangaza University College Institute of Spirituality and Religious Formation, The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi 2019*, 14.

³⁸Manavath, "Founders' Missionary Vision", 164

are life enhancing, dialogical and participative.³⁸ We should make our provincial or General Chapters to become habitual celebration permeated by a loving, responsible, obedient and caring dialogue and a fraternal and warm environment where everybody listens humbly and attentively to each other; with the full participation of every member of the fraternity across the generational divide.

A concrete measure would be enshrining in our constitutions the requirement that both chapter delegates and members of the Council should be selected or elected from different age groups. Only in this way could we ensure that all generations are represented at the table where policy decisions are made. And only by so doing can we succeed in having Councillors who exercise authority to build up a fraternity weaved with deep and intimate fraternal relationships of the brothers and sisters among themselves; Councillors who can create participative models of authority, whereby all the brothers and sisters have a say, before deciding on thorny issues that have serious consequences on the future of a local fraternity, a Province, or on the Order itself.

6. Experience of Ongoing Formation

Ongoing formation is an intrinsic aspect of the religious vocation, that is all-embracing process of renewal, targeting all aspects of the human person in relationship with the Institute to which he or she belongs. Ongoing formation is a path that is Open. It lasts all lifelong and has no closing date. As missionaries *dedicated to God and consecrated by Him*, our life is an ongoing process of formation with an attitude of *constant listening, and open to the surprises of the Word and the Spirit*.

It is all embracing involving the whole person and all dimensions of his/her personality in an integral process of growth: human, spiritual,

³⁸Manavath, "Founders' Missionary Vision", 164

intellectual, pastoral and charismatic levels, for the renewal of communities, missions, and the apostolic structures. The experience of ongoing formation varies but it seems to me that this aspect does not receive the adequate attention of Superiors as it should. For the clerical Institutes the emphasis is on initial formation beyond which missionaries arrive at a “status”. For non-clerical Institutes, scholasticate is seen as “punishment”, due to the pressures and urgency to get qualified professionals to man the apostolate of the Institute. What is your experience of ongoing formation in your Institute? However, for sustainability of our missionary enterprise, there is need to open a creative dialogue with members to see how to support them to continue to grow holistically in their vocation itineraries and be converted to the ideals of the Institute.

7. *Understanding Recent Changes in the Canon Law*

During the recent years, of Pope Francis, several changes have been made in the Code of Canon Laws as it pertains to Consecrated life. and illegitimate absence from community. For example, can. 694 § 1, on illegitimate absence from community Under the new law, promulgated by the pope in an apostolic letter issued "motu proprio," superiors can declare a member dismissed *ipso facto* if they have been illicitly absent from the community for more than a year and cannot be located. "Community life is an essential element of religious life," He cited canon 665 of the Code of Canon Law, which provides that "religious must live in their own religious house observing common life and cannot be absent without permission of their superior." And citing can. 665 § 2, which, based on the biblical injunction directed superiors to seek out those who are “lost”, emphasizing the pastoral profile of superiors. The modification of can. 694 § 1, must be studied carefully in dialogue to avoid misapplications.

8. Experience of Synodality in the Religious Life

Religious life is a form of Synodality. Men and women religious have a particular and important role to play in promoting Synodal conversion in the Particular Churches where they exist, drawing from their experiences as captured in their Constitutions and norms of religious life. In fact, religious life has a very concrete experience of this "walking together" and lived as a spiritual process, whether through its long experience of community life and discernment in common or through its deliberative and decision-making bodies, such as chapters and councils. Men and women religious have a duty to share these values with the entire Church and thus contribute to creating the new images of the Church suited for the Church in the third millennium. Religious life, as we know, is always present among the poorest. The synod's Preparatory Document and the *Vademecum* invite us to pay special attention to the poorest, the smallest and to those who are on the periphery. Synodality must encourage the participation of all and especially give voice to the voiceless. In this sense, "what place does the voice of minorities, the marginalized, the excluded occupy in our communities?"

Synodality is about collaboration, would it be possible to see that projects are being developed that associate one religious body with another, and with lay people, in reaching out in a creative and prophetic way in the work of evangelization.

9. Combatting Cliques with the Promotion of a Culture of Friendship

Clannishness and the formation of cliques along generational lines is one of the major causes of conflicts, and this is especially true in consecrated life. It is the canker worm that destabilizes the unity of community living. It is very challenging for community growth and makes people to move and do things in groups, with their friends,

instead of doing things collectively. These forming of cliques destroy inclusive relationship that strengthens community bond of peace. Making individuals cling, help and relates only to their friends living others out of space.

Genuine friendship, built on love, destabilizes cliques of any form in our community. Whereas cliques diversify the well-being of community living and destroys unity, peace progress and harmony among individual in a giving community and our society at large, genuine friendship and love creates a strong bond holding individuals together. Friendship reduces the tension and ensures that inter-generational conflicts are avoided.

10. Provisions for the Care of the Elderly

The fact that we are talking about dialogue across generations already imply that tensions exist among the old and the young members of the consecrated life. If this tension must be diffused, then there must be conscious policies devoted to the care of the elderly, the most vulnerable dimension in the divide. Let us be clear: The presence of the elderly in the religious communities is a very positive thing. Elderly members of our communities provide a witness, wisdom and prayer which are constant encouragements to the young in their spiritual and apostolic journey. It is therefore not surprising that “The Church document *fraternal Life in Community*³⁹ dedicates eight paragraphs for the care of the elderly religious.

The salient aspects of the document are:

- Religious communities should accept in their midst the elderly religious and esteem deeply their presence and the services which they can offer.
- Religious communities should provide them care and attention

³⁹CICLSAL, *Fraternal Life in Community*, 68, 69.

fraternally and, in a way, consistent with consecrated life those means of spiritual and material assistance which the elderly need.

- Consecrated persons also should prepare themselves long in advance for becoming old and for extending their “active” years by learning to discover their new way of building community and collaborating in the common mission and responding positively to the challenges of their age.
- Superiors must arrange courses and meetings for the elderly religious to assist personal preparation and to prolong and enhance their presence in their normal workplaces.
- When in time these elderly members lose their autonomy or require special care, even when their health is cared for by lay persons, the institute should support and care them in such a way that they continue to feel a part of the life of the institute, sharers in its mission.⁴⁰

It is also important that the elderly equip themselves and that they feel energetic and young at heart always. There should be concrete plan to care the aged members. Provisions must be made for them to move in freely in the wheelchair inside the house and the campus. It is good to keep the aged religious active as much as possible. It is not a bad idea to provide a computer to them to write their memoirs, experiences, reflections, homilies, and biblical commentaries. It is profoundly encouraging to discuss the congregational matters with them. Occasionally, ways are to be found to share the meals with them even if they are bed-ridden.

⁴⁰S. Anselmus, “Compassionate Care for the Aged and Sick Members of Community” in SanyaSa, *Journal of Consecrated Life* Vol. XII, No. 2 (2017), 233-244 (236).

Even the elderly religious have the desire and longing to visit the communities, friends and family members. It is therefore important to give them the opportunity and space to do whatever is possible for them. They need to be encouraged to do what they can, and they must be generously appreciated for the works done. The elderly after their so-called retirement should try to do what they want to do, do research in new topics and keep themselves busy always by reading, writing and listening besides resting and relaxing. They can see and experience God and life from a higher perspective and share and write those precious experiences for the future generations.⁴¹

Regarding caring for and appreciating the elderly members of our different orders, we can learn from our present Supreme Pontiff, Pope Francis. On the occasion of the gathering of the grandparents and the elderly at St. Peter's square on 28th September 2014 in which Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI was also present, Pope Francis, looking at his predecessor in Office said: "I specially thank Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI for his presence. I have said many times that I am so happy that he lives here at the Vatican because it is like having the wise grandfather at home". Yes, every elderly religious in religious communities, in congregations is like having a wise grandfather or grandmother at home. The presence of the elderly members in religious communities and in religious congregation should make everyone happy.

Conclusion

When all is said and done, members of the consecrated life, in their common life, should seek a fruitful exchange between young and old, "never discarding whole generations."⁴² Commenting on the Lucan

⁴¹ Anselmus, "Compassionate Care for the Aged", 238

⁴² Pope Francis, "World Day of Consecrated Life Homily (WDCL)," 2018.

passage of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:22–39), Francis affirms that “an institute remains youthful by going back to its roots, by listening to its older members. There is no future without this encounter between the old and the young. There is no growth without roots and no flowering without new buds. There is never prophecy without memory, or memory without prophecy. And constant encounter.”⁴³ Religious communities favouring such fruitful encounter and communication do much to console their elders, enrich their younger members, and give convincing, prophetic witness of communion to a world increasingly afflicted by intergenerational apartheid. This should be our dream as Institutes of Consecrated Life; and realising this dream should be our major challenge and our primary task as Major Superiors of our respective Institutes.

⁴³ Pope Francis, “WDCL Homily,” 2018.