

Criteria for Reconfiguring A Province or Vicariate: A Choice for Life

Introduction

In September 2001, the delegates to the Seventeenth General Assembly gathered in Rome to address the theme: “The Future Face of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood.” In looking into our future as an international congregation, the delegates believed that reconfiguring may become desirable in the years ahead.

In September 2002, the major superiors came together in Niagara Falls, Ontario, and decided to place this document in the context of a process of envisioning the future of our congregation in discussions that would take place in regional gatherings of the members. The major superiors saw this as a way of promoting the examination of relationships both present and past in order to create new relationships among the members and reconfigure units of the community. This document is seen as a tool to be used in future collaboration among the various units of the society.

The opportunity to change in response to new circumstances can be a moment of grace, offering us the prospect of new life, even though such change might be prompted by what might be a painful situation. Our spirituality invites us to cross boundaries, to let go, and to see the life which can emerge beyond what might appear to be dying.

In other words, reconfiguring can mean a choice for life, a choice to live more fully the charism and mission of our Founder. Such reorganization can provide the chance to find new ways of being missionary, of being in community and of deepening our spirituality. Reconfiguring can lead to a better stewardship of our human and economic resources for the sake of our mission.

Such a process can mean internal reorganization, new ways of collaborating, merging with or joining another unit of the Society, or even creating something new.

We face our future with hope and trust that the Lord who has begun the good work in St. Gaspar and his companions will enable us to continue that work in this third millennium of Christianity.

Background

The delegates of the Seventeenth General Assembly approved a draft document on reconfiguring. This document proposed criteria for reconfiguring a province or vicariate. The text was distributed to all the members for their comments and suggestions and then brought to the Major Superiors for final discussion and was approved on 13 September 2002.

This document presents criteria which might be used to evaluate the need for reconfiguring, values to be honored in any such process, and a model for the process itself. Some material has been drawn from the document *Criteria for Founding a Mission/ Delegation and Erecting a Vicariate or Province* approved in 1998 at a meeting of the Major Superiors. While the processes involved are in some ways similar, they are not entirely parallel.

The Normative Texts determine who makes the decision for the erection of vicariates or provinces (cf. C 71; S 36, S 45). Presumably the same bodies would have authority for the reconfiguring process.

General Criteria

A province or vicariate may decide to initiate a discussion of reconfiguring for positive reasons. While the province or vicariate may be in good overall health, members might see possibilities for more creative and effective ministry and community life in some kind of reorganization, some sort of new reality.

On the other hand, a province or vicariate might find itself facing a problem or problems which might trigger such discussion. The following criteria describe ongoing conditions which should prompt serious discussion on the part of a province or vicariate or on the part of the Moderator General and General Council. They are based on the three pillars of the C.P.P.S. as a Society of Apostolic Life: apostolic mission, community life, and spirituality.

A province or vicariate which recognizes that it no longer meets one or more criteria might take steps to address the challenges posed prior to any discussion of reconfiguring.

The criteria proposed are not of equal weight and should be applied with prudence and good judgment.

Mission and Apostolate

1.1 The vicariate or province can no longer sustain the ministries to which it has committed itself. Members pursue only personal commitments.

1.2 The vicariate or province can no longer contribute the richness of its charism to the pastoral plan of the diocese.

1.3 As a vicariate, it no longer has at least twelve definitively incorporated members. As a province, it no longer has twenty definitively incorporated members. Age, health of members, the number of active members and candidates in formation should also be considered.

1.4 It can no longer meet its financial responsibilities as a vicariate or as a province, in sustaining its houses, internal and external ministries, and the well-being of its active and retired members.

1.5 At the same time, an otherwise healthy province/ vicariate could meet these responsibilities through a sharing of economic resources by other units of the Congregation.

Community Life

2.1. The province or vicariate is no longer able to create and sustain a community life which nourishes and supports the members in their apostolates nor is there a guarantee that it will receive support from other units of the Society. Community life includes a willingness to share in common the prayer and mission of the Society and to come together for days of prayer, study, assemblies, etc.

2.2. The province or vicariate has not been able to attract and sustain vocations to its membership over an extended period of time.

2.3. There are not sufficient active members to maintain structures of governance, so that no one remains in office for too long a period of time (cf. canon 624 §2).

2.4. The formation program cannot be maintained, even with collaboration with another unit of the C.P.P.S.

Spirituality

3.1 The vicariate or province finds itself too small for common spiritual activities such as an annual retreat and the celebration of feast days. A shared prayer life is lacking.

3.2 The spirituality of the Society is no longer a common source of the apostolate and is not being shared with the laity.

Values to be Considered in the Process

These are values which should be honored in each step of the reconfiguring process:

- Creating something new might be superior to reconfiguring the old or clinging to past models;
- Full consultation with, and participation of, the members affected should always be sought. Each member and his apostolate is valuable;
- Sensitivity to the history, culture, philosophy, and language of the vicariates or provinces affected is important;
- There should be ample care of members before, during, and after the process;
- Better stewardship of finances would better support community life and mission;
- A sharing in financial resources (e.g., through a “solidarity fund”) should be considered in the case of an otherwise healthy unit of the Society which faces economic uncertainty;
- More equitable disposition of community property might be called for;
- Mutuality is crucial: i.e., one province/vicariate should not be dominant over another in the process;
- Attention must be paid to civil legal consequences of reconfiguring, e.g., pension funds;
- Lay associates should be involved in the process to the extent this is possible.

These values should be affirmed for all the provinces or vicariates involved in the reconfiguring, especially if there is the possibility of members of one unit joining another.

Desired Outcomes

Although it may be that discussion about reconfiguring might be prompted by negative events or situations, the following are some of the positive outcomes which could result from reconfiguring:

- A renewal of the spiritual life of the members;
- A regrouping of members and resources in order to engage more fully and effectively in mission;
- The development of a more healthy and dynamic community life;
- The development of better resources for attracting vocations;
- A wider pool of members available for leadership;
- The opportunity to engage in new areas of apostolic mission;
- A richer and more diverse program of formation.

Steps in Reconfiguring

How should the process be undertaken? It would appear that there are several steps. First there is the initiation of discussion. This can happen in either of two ways.

In the first way, the vicariate or province comes to the decision to initiate the process after discussion and a vote in an assembly. This happens after a voluntary examination of the situation and a realization that the members want to initiate a process of reconfiguring. A decision to initiate the discussion does not mean that a decision has already been made about the eventual reconfiguring.

In the second way, the Moderator General, after a visitation of the province or vicariate, notes in his report that sufficient signs of an incapacity to continue as a vicariate or province are present to warrant discussion of the issue. In coming to this conclusion the Moderator General should have spent sufficient time in the province or vicariate to assess the reality of its life. He should encourage renewing the values and spirit of the Society within the province or vicariate before asking for discussion of reconfiguring to take place.

The Moderator General, with the advice and consent of his Council, may mandate such a discussion to begin, and require a report to be presented by the vicariate or province. The report should: 1) make a cogent case for the ongoing viability of the vicariate or province; or 2) at least show why reconfiguring would be harmful to the life of the vicariate or province in regard to its apostolic mission, community life, and spirituality; or 3) would agree that reconfiguring is necessary and outline a direction it might take in the discussion step.

Second is the discussion step. This would involve getting members to reach agreement that something should be done. While the outcome may not be unanimous, there should be an opportunity for all sides to be heard. Prior to reconfiguring the possibility of assistance from another province or provinces should be considered. In the case of a province or vicariate which may face suppression there should be the opportunity for the membership to choose to join another unit of the Society, merge, or start a new unit of the Society.

Third: preparing a plan. This would involve an invitation from the Moderator General to the vicariate or province to come up with a plan for transition to its new situation, taking into account the values articulated above. In the process care should be taken to involve all members who might be affected. Building a consensus among them should be encouraged. The plan would be submitted on a timeframe set by the Moderator. Submission of the plan would imply acceptance by a simple majority of the members in the vicariate or province.

Fourth comes a review of the plan which is done by the Moderator General and General Council. They would review the plan to be sure it conforms with the Normative Texts and the values and criteria of this document.

Fifth is the final decision and implementation. A decision would be made at a meeting of the Major Superiors with the Moderator General and General Council. In implementing the decision attention should be given to helping members adapt to the new reality, giving them an opportunity to make choices where this is possible.

Approved at the meeting of the Moderator General and General Council with the Major Superiors on September 13, 2002, Niagara Falls, Ontario. Revised September 15, 2016, Rome, Italy.