**VALUES OF HEALTHY COMMUNITY AND APOSTOLIC LIFE**

We are all familiar with our Redemptorist Constitutions and we know that as a Congregation to work in fraternal and apostolic communities is essential to us. This is part of our DNA. We place Christ at the centre of our lives and communities and our members and communities should be in a process of constant conversion.

I would think that as Religious men we are among the Congregations that most emphasize the importance of community, not only as an evangelical/theological value in itself, but also for mission.

I will not go into the significance of each of our Constitutions on Community and Apostolic life but have decided to address this theme from a different angle, which is, the values and characteristics of many vibrant Religious Communities in the Church and their particular attractiveness, which, by the way, according to Pope Francis, is the best way to do vocation promotion, that is by attraction.

The following reflections are a composite of different contributions from the Puerto Rican Conference of Religious, of which I was a member of the council for seven years, from reflections made by the Latin American Conference of Religious (CLAR) and its president, Sister Mercedes Casas, F.Sp.S., and from a professor of ecclesiology at the Gregorianum in Rome, Father John Fullenbach, a Divine Word Father.

As I go through some of these values and characteristics, you may be reminded of St. Alphonsus and the very beginnings of our own Congregation.

1. *Vibrant Religious Communities* reveal a great confidence in the Holy Spirit. If there is a new missionary initiative to take on, they do not first ask: Do we have the money? or, do we have the personnel? The first question is simply: “Is the Holy Spirit calling us to do this work in light of our charism?”
2. *Vibrant Religious Communities* reflect a deep sense of responsibility for the spiritual life of each one in the community and generally of the whole Institute. They are concerned about the spiritual growth of each member and of the Institute.
3. *Vibrant Religious Communities* share the experiences of their spiritual life: they share Christ. At least once a week, the communities meet to share and interchange the experiences of their spiritual life. They share their experiences of Christ based on personal and communal conversion and not on theoretic knowledge.
4. *Vibrant Religious Communities* are “passionate” about Jesus and His Kingdom, and they inspire others by their “hearts of fire” as they commit themselves based on their Charism for the building up of the Kingdom of God.
5. *Vibrant Religious Communities* do not collapse when faced with reality, they rather generate dreams of hope, and they tell us that the presence of Consecrated Life is valuable and possible, even in western more secularistic societies.
6. *Vibrant Religious Communities* live out the following of Jesus with joy, freshness, enthusiasm, generosity and as the best that could have happened to them in their lives. Their lives are attractive, and they generate in others the desire to follow the Lord in this life-style.
7. *Vibrant Religious Communities* are the “new wine” which the Spirit is producing in

Consecrated Life and they generate the possibility of new wine skins (containers)

that are more transparent, tolerant, human, and humanizing.

1. *Vibrant Religious Communities* possess a refined sensibility for experiencing the joys

and the cries of humanity, and they generate a new *mystical orientated to action*

(Karl Rahner).

1. *Vibrant Religious Communities* know how to tell the truth in love because they do

not conform with the establishment and they generate a more authentic and

committed prophecy of Consecrated Life, lighter in structures and more audacious.

1. *Vibrant Religious Communities* recognize their limits, their littleness, their fragility

and they give witness to a more evangelical manner of being in the world, from the

power of the unimportant and the ordinary, where the protagonist is the Spirit (*Cf.*

the experience of St. Paul, II Cor. 12, 7 - 10).

1. *Vibrant Religious Communities* have as their constant point of reference the Word

of God and they re-read God´s Word from the perspective of their charismatic

legacy.

1. *Vibrant Religious Communities* maintain their attention on the cries in creation

because they care for life and they foster a world more inhabitable, where all feel

that they are brothers and sisters.

1. *Vibrant Religious Communities* know how to use skilfully and creatively social

networking and they generate new ways of thinking and being present in today´s

world, without losing their capacity for solitude, silence and intimacy and the

concrete attention with those with whom they share daily their lives and mission.

1. *Vibrant Religious Communities*, besides promoting continued formation by

workshops, courses, higher studies, also emphasize and structure continued

formation in their local communities. (Pope Francis has commented that continued

formation is not just a matter of participating in workshops and courses on the unit

level, but also has to be done on the local community level. He goes on to say that

communities that do not have continued formation at the community level have no

right to promote vocations to their Institutes.)

Besides these fourteen points, I think something should be said about the leadership in this model of community and apostolic life:

* the leaders (superiors) of Vibrant Religious Communities are characterized by their simplicity and humility. They exercise their authority as did Jesús! Even corporations with humble and encouraging leaders realize how much more effective and productive they become and how much growth their corporation experience when their leadership is simple and humble. This is because the humble leader listens and promotes the talents of the employees and the shared responsibility for the corporation and its growth into the future. The members of the corporation even begin to imitate the leader.
* Also, essential to their leadership is a VISION.

You may remember the retreat given to the Capitulars of the last General Chapter by the Cardenal of Manila, Cardenal Tagle. The Cardenal describes a healthy and evangelical vision as one that:

- elevates our focus

- orientates a direction and

- ignites, excites the heart. On this last point he, jokingly but meaningfully commented, that the vision should so much touch the heart that it provokes tears in our eyes. He mentioned how many visions provoke tears, but not of emotion, rather of disappointment.

Some possible questions that may benefit your reflections:

**What do you think about the quality of your own experience of community life?**

**Would you characterize your Religious local and Provincial Community as “vibrant”?**

**What can you do to improve your community life and its mission?**