



Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church

Executive Summary

Fr. Stephen Tutas, S.M
Bro. Jack Ventura, S.M.

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Looking back with gratitude

- *Brother* is the name traditionally given to the male lay religious in the Church since the beginnings of consecrated life. ¹
- *From the first centuries of Christianity even to this day, consecrated life has been predominantly lay members.* It is an expression of the desire of lay men and women to live the Gospel explicitly and radically stems from their Baptism. ²

The Role of the Brother Today

- Encouraged by the Spirit, the Church today deepens its awareness of being the People of God, where all have equal dignity received in Baptism. All have a common vocation to holiness, and share responsibility for the mission of evangelization. Religious life is born and inserted into this baptized people, and as such always develops and deepens baptismal consecration. ³

The Ideal of Brotherhood

- *The vocation of the Brother is part of the answer that God gives us to the absence of brotherhood which wounds the world today.* ⁴
- The ministry of Brothers as religious in the Church is "to remind the baptized of the fundamental values of the Gospel." *The Brother presents those fundamental values within the context of fraternal relationships. He stands against inequality and the temptation to dominate.* ⁵
- *The Brother affirms his belonging to the community of believers, inserting himself into the life of the local Church, in accordance with his own charism.* He also affirms his belonging to all humankind. *He stands in solidarity with all people, especially with those weakest and most vulnerable.* ⁶

- Brothers are gathered together in community before being sent out in mission. Their Brotherhood is a source of strength for the mission, but it relies upon another force: The Holy Spirit. *From the Spirit comes the cultivation of brotherhood creating a greater sense of mission, and the mission itself produces brotherhood.*⁷
- The Brother is aware that all parts of creation are imbued with the love and presence of God. *Thus the Brother commits himself to work with professionalism and competent service for the sake of those he serves, no matter how profane it may seem.*⁸

Ministerial fraternity: "source and fruit of mission"

- These communities of Brothers are fraternities of service. *The ecclesial ministry assumed by the community of Brothers gives it its distinctive identity in the Church.* The community stresses the fraternal relationships between its members, with those who participate in its mission, and those who are served... The ministry is not carried out by an individual but by the community. The members of a ministerial community can perform many different functions; some may even be unable to carry out any outside task due to illness or age.⁹
- The ministry of the community is not identified with any particular task. *It is the whole community which embodies the mission* through the various services of its members, including that of prayer, the offering of their sufferings by the sick, and solidarity with each other. The entire community is responsible for the mission that the Church has entrusted to it.¹⁰
- *Fraternal living does not automatically become a reality through the observance of the rules governing common life. While it is true that the structures are necessary, community among the Brothers is expressed mainly through their attitudes.* They come together to participate more fully in the life and mission of Jesus. From this standpoint they organize their apostolic action, aware that this consists in transmitting what the Brothers have previously lived in community. Their brotherhood will create brotherhood. The mission of the Brothers is characterized as one who is being in communion and creating communion.¹¹

Brotherhood and evangelical counsels: a counter-sign

- *The community of Brothers lives its prophetic mission counter-culturally, because its lifestyle, according to the Gospel, is opposed to what the world promotes. It should not be forgotten, however, that community is a fragile sign that needs constant renewal. It must be lived on the path to holiness and with an evangelical dynamism that enlivens and constantly remakes the structures.*¹²
- *Brothers offer themselves as guides in the search for God, aware of their own inconsistencies, but able to accompany all people on their faith journey. In the community, the Brothers invite people to prayer and share the experience of God. And the Brothers facilitate widespread reading of Scripture and to deepen the dialogue between faith and culture.*¹³
- Contemplative communities of Brothers are a powerful sign which witness to our society that is often alienated from God. They are meeting places for young people and adults in search of the deeper meaning of their lives.¹⁴
- *Where are the frontiers of mission today? These frontiers coincide with the dramatic reality that so many men and women experience marked by migration, hunger, injustice, indifference and lack of sensitivity to the pain of others, superficiality and the loss of religious and human values. The vocation of the Brother, authentically lived and embodied in this reality, acquires a wonderful meaning.*¹⁵
- Many Brothers carry out their mission often in secular professions: health service, education, assistance to immigrants, the accompaniment of children and adolescents at risk, etc. *They give witness that their commitment to the Kingdom implies that the efforts to build a more human and inhabitable world, with the love of Christ, is linked to the love of humanity, especially its weakest and neediest members.*¹⁶
- There is no retirement in the evangelizing mission. One simply participates in the mission in different ways. One way, and a very important one, is supporting the common mission with prayer and sacrifice. Another way is through small services that can be offered depending on the person's health, and are witness to and promote gratuitous service.¹⁷

- *The contribution expected of older Brothers is not the performance of specific tasks but primarily being in the community as teachers of life and hope. They are companions on the journey and support those most involved in the external tasks of the mission. In that way they contribute to the community as prophetic signs of faith, love and hope for the community and the whole of society.*¹⁸

Prophets for our time

- The prophecy of hospitality is an openness and acceptance of the other, the stranger, the foreigner, the one from a different religion, race or culture. *Hospitality is an essential element of human coexistence in the face today of intolerance, exclusion or the lack of dialogue.*
- The prophecy of the meaning of life is the service of dialogue and gentle listening. Many Brothers devote much of their time to helping people discover the essential meaning of life in the face of the vacuum of meaning that exists in the society.
- The prophecy of the affirmation of feminine values in the history of humanity calls Religious Brothers to contribute with their fraternal support and their appreciation of the presence of women, religious and lay, in evangelization.
- The prophecy of the care and protection of life, of the integrity of creation often call religious men and women to risk their lives by denouncing practices and policies that threaten human life and its habitat. Other Brothers devote much of their time and energy to manual labor for the conservation of nature. Their consecration and their spiritual value of the mission attempts to preserve our world for future generations.
- The prophecy of the wise use of new technologies serves the mission to communicate well, to democratize information, even for the most disadvantaged. They contribute to make these technologies useful instruments in the task of evangelization.¹⁹

As family: a new way of being Church

- The Religious Brother today often live their vocation as members of a larger ecclesial family. Laity and religious, men and women, and clergy are often united together in a larger charismatic family to serve together in the same ecclesial mission.²⁰
 - The Religious Brother finds in his ecclesial and charismatic family an environment conducive to the development of his identity. *In such an environment the Brother share the experience of communion and promote communion. That communion is the true blood that gives life to the ecclesial family members and extends to the whole Church from them. In this ecclesial and charismatic family, Religious Brothers build a fraternity for the mission.* They are signs of that same brotherhood that they are called to live within consecrated life.²¹
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QUESTIONS FOR COMMUNITY DISCUSSION & DIALOGUE

- ✚ What did you find most helpful in this document?
- ✚ In what ways has this document helped you to value the vocation and mission of the Marianist Religious Brother?
- ✚ How has this document helped you to value the “Mixed Composition” of the Society of Mary and sharpened your awareness of the importance of our witness of collaborative ministry in the Church today?

¹ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church* (4 October, 2015), Section 1.b

² Ibid., Section 1.a

³ Ibid., Section 6.a

⁴ Ibid., Section 6.c

⁵ Ibid., Section 7.a

⁶ Ibid., Section 10.c

⁷ Ibid., Section 11.b-11.c

⁸ Ibid., Section 13.f

⁹ Ibid., Section 23.d

¹⁰ Ibid., Section 23.d

¹¹ Ibid., Section 24.a-24.b

¹² Ibid., Section 25.b

¹³ Ibid., Section 29.b

¹⁴ Ibid., Section 29.c

¹⁵ Ibid., Section 30.c

¹⁶ Ibid., Section 31.a

¹⁷ Ibid., Section 36.a

¹⁸ Ibid., Section 36.b

¹⁹ Ibid., Section 37

²⁰ Ibid., Section 38.a

²¹ Ibid., Section 38.c