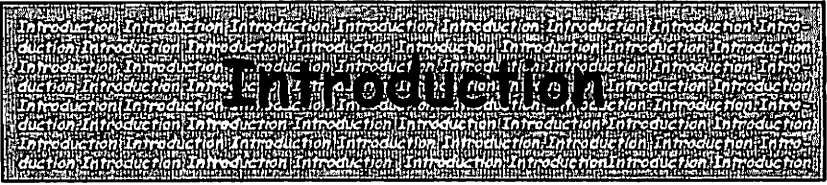


**Statement
of the SVD 15th General Chapter 2000**



**Listening to the Spirit:
Our Missionary
Response Today**

**July 14, 2000
Nemi**



Gratitude and Hope

On the threshold of the new millennium, we consider it a special 1
blessing to have gathered at Nemi to celebrate the 15th General
Chapter of the Society of the Divine Word. Taking
place on the 125th anniversary of our Society's
foundation, the Chapter was an occasion for us to
look back in gratitude and to look ahead in hope.
We are profoundly grateful to the Triune God for
entrusting the beginnings of our religious
missionary family to Arnold Janssen and the men
and women of the founding generation. Along with
subsequent generations of missionaries, they form
a "cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12:1) spurring us on
to face the future with confidence and continue
the work they began.

During the past
three years
we have sought
to discern
what the Spirit
is telling us.

The 15th General Chapter has been the high point in a long process 2
of listening to the Spirit in order to renew our missionary response
today. At all levels of the Society during the past three years, all of
us, individually and as communities, have sought to read the "signs
of the times" and discern what the Spirit is telling us now. This
process was an effort to place ourselves and our Society entirely
under the guidance and direction of the Spirit, in the conviction
that missionary activity is by its very nature his work and revelation
(c. 105).

The present document is one fruit of this process of seeking the 3
guidance of the Spirit. In it we articulate our missionary charism anew

in creative fidelity to the legacy of our Founder and the founding generation and in response to the challenges of today. With it we renew our commitment to mission in our time, confident in the abiding presence of the Spirit.

Ongoing Discernment

- 4 **I**n this process of listening to the Spirit, we have rediscovered the need for ongoing discernment in mission.
- 5 Firstly, we believe that it is the Spirit who both enables us to recognize signs in the contemporary world and empowers us to probe their positive and negative import for mission. It may be that signs of suffering, such as poverty, marginalization, ethnic conflicts, and interreligious violence, more easily catch our attention. But there are also more hopeful signs including the growing awareness of human rights, the struggle against corruption and world debt, the spirited campaign to protect the integrity of creation, and the resolute dedication of many different religious groups to collaborate together in life-enhancing initiatives. All of these are truly heartening and no less remarkable.
- 6 Furthermore, we believe that the Spirit is intimately and inseparably linked with the Word, incarnate in Jesus Christ and encountered in Holy Scripture. Constitution 407 assures us that “by reading the Scriptures we open our hearts to the promptings of the Holy Spirit who helps us grasp the word, make it our own and announce it to the world.” At every stage of its unfolding, our commitment to mission is to be nurtured by a constant recourse to Sacred Scripture. Prayerful pondering and reflective silence make the biblical word alive for us and illumine our reflection. The insights we gain through the serious study of the world and the word of God need to be sifted in prayer so that our decision-making becomes a genuine exercise of discernment.
- 7 Finally, we believe that community is the ideal context for discernment. It is true that the Spirit often speaks through the creative insights of individuals, but we are convinced that such

intuitions need to be tested in community, where our charism and tradition can be brought into the discernment process. Obviously the struggle involved in striking a balance between individual and community discernment will remain. But community deliberations, both within our religious community and with the people we serve, do often become the real touchstone of a Spirit-inspired insight.

Along the Path of Post-Conciliar Renewal

The reflections on our missionary response today, which we offer in this document, are but another step in the journey of discernment undertaken after Vatican II for the purpose of renewing our Society. Over four general chapters, from the 9th in 1967/68 to the 12th in 1982, our efforts centred on updating our Constitutions and giving a renewed expression to our missionary charism. Subsequent developments prompted us to continue to reflect on, and deepen our understanding of, our call to mission. The 13th General Chapter in 1988 is memorable for its introduction of the theme of “Passing Over” which runs through the threefold document on SVD Mission, Spirituality and Formation. The 14th General Chapter in 1994 focused its attention on the theme of “Communion.” In this 15th General Chapter in the Jubilee Year 2000, we wish to widen the horizons of our understanding still more and to recommit ourselves to mission.

Community deliberations do often become the real touchstone of a Spirit-inspired insight.

It is obvious that a document like the present one cannot say everything about our life and work as a religious missionary congregation. Its main purpose is to further clarify our call to mission, reaffirm our missionary response today, and indicate a direction for the future. With this in view, in the following pages we will take stock of the *Context of Mission Today*, articulate *Our Call to Mission*, and set *Our Missionary Response*.



- 10 **W**e first consider the context of mission today, one that has become so complex that it is almost impossible to present a comprehensive account of it. We are aware of important “signs of the times,” both positive and negative, which demand serious and specific responses from each of us personally, from our local communities and provinces, and from our general administration. We limit ourselves to sketching a brief outline of some of these elements in our contemporary world.

1. Our World Today

1.1. Major World-Changing Trends

- 11 **G**lobalization. Society is changing at a dizzying pace as innovations in communication, information and transportation technologies reshape our world. Global and local life conditions are becoming much more integrated. A global free-market economy is being organized based on what is usually called “neo-liberalism,” with its diverse economic, social and ideological aspects. These include the ruthless pursuit of profit at the cost of scandalous poverty and horrendous suffering both in developing and developed countries, and the marginalization and exclusion of large groups of people and indeed of whole geographical areas.
- 12 **U**rbanization. The rapidly growing world population is concentrating in larger cities. Many rural communities are withering as cities and mega-cities boom. Overcrowding ensues and unemployment increases. People are forced to accommodate

themselves to the more aggressive rhythms and faster pace of city life, often in inhuman conditions. In particular, the city holds a special attraction for youth who, uprooted from the traditional values and patterns of life, frequently experience a loss of identity.

Migrants, Refugees, and Displaced People. The search for better living conditions is producing massive migration among the poor. Within countries, people move in search of easier access to work, health care and education. On the international level, similar motivations induce large numbers of people to move from the South to the North and from the East to the West. In addition, the political, ethnic and religious conflicts which afflict many parts of the world have uprooted millions from their families and homeland, making ours an “age of refugees.” 13

Quest for Liberation. Although political and economic changes have certainly altered the landscape in the movement for liberation, the quest persists unabated among many peoples. The fall of East European Socialism has further changed the political and economic balance of forces. Yet the struggle for greater freedom and autonomy of peoples and for a transformation of society — including an increasingly stronger thrust towards the emancipation of women — continues in different parts of the world. It is true, however, that a certain sense of frustration and impotence often accompanies such movements today. The dominant political and economic powers, often abetted by a compliant and manipulated mass media, try to convince people that there is no viable alternative to the neo-liberal model. This challenges us to stimulate the search for a more humane and just economic system. 14

The gap between the rich and poor is widening as large groups are left out of the new economic order.

1.2. Some Consequences

Although there are positive elements in global integration, it has become evident that, on the cultural and social levels, 15

core elements of the neo-liberal ideology underlying the imposition of economic liberalization are profoundly inhuman, and therefore anti-evangelical. Its prevailing concern is for profit rather than for justice or the dignity of human life, and its instinct to “let the market decide” favours the interests of the powerful. In many areas the privatization of essential services (such as health, education, roads and water supplies) has only increased the marginalization of the poor.

- 16 ***Social and Political Consequences.*** While greater world integration has come about, there is also an inbuilt process of exclusion that is at work on the economic, social and political levels. The gap between the rich and poor is widening as large groups are left out of the new economic order. While world and local economies produce massive wealth, the poor, unemployed and powerless are simply pushed to the fringes of society, often without even the bare minimum for survival. Women, children, the aged and the weak are generally the first to be excluded. The situation is one of structural violence. In such a context, crime, hatred and war thrive, often fomented by the arms trade and drug trafficking, allied to endemic corruption in many countries.
- 17 At the same time, many groups are organizing themselves to promote wider local and global solidarity. Many among the excluded, by working together, are becoming important social actors (e.g. women, indigenous peoples, Afro-Americans, dalits in India, people affected by HIV/AIDS, etc.). Many Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have contributed to this conscientization and organization.
- 18 ***Ecological Consequences.*** Certainly one of the “victims” of the process of the new economic order and neo-liberal ideology has been “mother earth.” The unscrupulous search for profit has led to the irresponsible exploitation of the planet’s limited resources, causing grave damage to the ecosystem. Continued plundering of nature and abuse of the environment are seriously endangering the earth’s future. Indeed we have arrived at a crisis point.

At the same time, however, we can see a growth of ecological consciousness in recent years. We are more conscious that we share the planet as a common home and are more ready to protest against dominant economic forces which show little respect for the environment. It has become apparent how fragile the earth is and how important it is to care for God's creation. 19

Cultural Consequences. People from different cultures are in much closer contact today. Most cities are inhabited by widely diverse cultural groups. Television, radio and films, the internet, newspapers and magazines, popular music and fashion, all flood our lives with images from near and far, stimulating a "consumer mentality." Global integration is producing cultural change at breakneck speed. It comes so fast that it is impossible to assimilate its consequences. People find themselves exposed to pressures and challenges that they have rarely had to confront before. Different elements are juxtaposed rather than integrated into a common pattern. The fragmentation and depersonalization of life, allied to a consequent multiplication of world-views, have become typical elements of post-modern societies. 20

While many have become completely secularized, in others there is a thirst for the Holy and for the experience of the Transcendent.

In the process, groups and individuals feel excluded from the reshaping of cultural ways. They suspect that everyone is being forced into a monocultural world. The feelings of exclusion and wariness have helped to provoke cultural revivals, with stress on local languages, music, mythmaking, etc. The same feelings have also induced an increase in ethnocentrism and in inter-ethnic tensions and violence. Cultural groups today show both a deeper awareness regarding human rights and an increasing tendency to individualism. 21

Religious Consequences. Given the rapid change in our world, many feel the need for a deeper meaning to give direction to their 22

lives. As a result, while many have become completely secularized, in others there is a thirst for the Holy and for the experience of the Transcendent. In some parts of the world, religion is in a revival phase. The current stress on individual choice means that proposals from institutionalized religious bodies do not find automatic acceptance. Truth and meaning are regarded as matters of individual discernment based on personal experience. Many people find the guidance and support they seek in small groups or in independent churches. Pentecostal/Charismatic groups are thriving, as are many new religious movements. Religious fundamentalism and pronounced secularism are growing side by side in many parts of the world. Thus, religious revival is an ambiguous phenomenon, which can serve either to help liberate or alienate the poor and oppressed.

- 23 The mobility of peoples has also placed different religious communities in closer contact. Consequently, there is growing interest in interreligious dialogue and in efforts for interfaith collaboration to address concrete social needs. There is also the phenomenon of multiple religious affiliations. At the same time, as people refocus their identity in a particular faith community, there is often a growth in religious intolerance and interreligious violence.

2. Our Church Today

- 24 **T**he Church today has become truly worldwide, although, in some countries, Christians form but a tiny minority. In our own Catholic tradition, in almost every part of the world local churches have been established as part of a worldwide communion. There are many encouraging signs, such as the increasing commitment of the laity, action for justice and peace, efforts towards interreligious dialogue, etc. The resulting diversity of local church customs and theologies frightens a good many Church members and authorities. Some react by insisting on uniformity in the interest of protecting unity and others by advocating innovation without regard for its effects. Still others patiently

encourage the development of structures for dialogue that lead to mutual understanding and protect both unity and diversity.

In many areas, the institutional Church seems to have regressed in recent years, with a consequent crisis of authority for many people. Clericalism has become more accentuated; at times the wishes of local Churches regarding Episcopal nominations are disregarded; and the exclusion of women from decision-making processes continues. There is also a credibility gap due to moral scandals that have rocked the Church in various countries. An enormous amount remains to be done for the inculturation of the Gospel. 25

As with so many other aspects of Church life, Vatican II was a watershed in the understanding and practice of mission. The previous epoch emphasized almost exclusively the role of the professional (usually foreign-born) missionary. "Mission" was generally understood to refer to Africa, Asia, Oceania and Latin America. The immediate goals of mission were to establish the local Church and to invite non-Christians to conversion so they could be saved. 26

In our own day we emphasize that the entire Church is missionary, while recognizing a diversity of roles in the Church's wide-ranging activities. The "locus" of mission is understood more in terms of specific missionary situations than in terms of geographical territory. And the long-term goal of mission is much more prominent, i.e., to gather the whole of humanity into the Kingdom of God. This is done through explicit proclamation of the Good News and respectful dialogue with people of other faith traditions, by inviting women and men into a community of witness and service, and by bringing God's mission of integral salvation to each person. 27

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of mission.

Martyrdom has become a reality in the life of many local Churches. It has become clear that prophetic witness to the Gospel necessarily 28

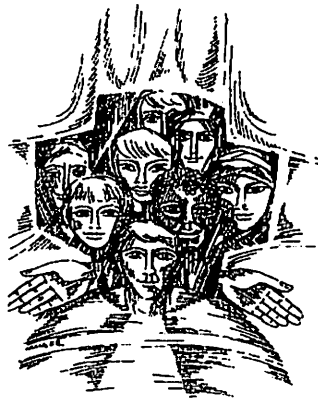
brings with it the opposition of the powerful and the oppressors, be they of the Left or the Right. Religious missionaries are called to be unconditionally on the side of the oppressed, to be martyrs (i.e., witnesses) to the radical following of Jesus in the living out of his concrete options in our own contexts.

3. *Our Society Today*

- 29 **O**ur Society is experiencing many trends that parallel those in the wider Church. Our membership is more diverse than ever. While, until recent times, SVD missionary service was carried out largely by members from Europe or of European ancestry, the bulk of the membership is now coming from the former “mission territories.” Our global distribution of personnel allows for the formation of international/intercultural communities in many parts of the world. Unfortunately, various restrictions in some countries prevent us from giving a more fully international witness.
- 30 The development of our Zones, with their respective subzones, is gradually helping us see beyond our own specific apostolate and even beyond our communities, provinces or regions. Gradually, and perhaps painfully, we are growing in communion and acquiring a sense that we belong not just to a province/region but to the Africa-Madagascar (AFRAM), Pan-American (PANAM), Asia-Pacific (ASPAC), or European (EUROPE) zone. Slowly, and hopefully surely, we are learning to think more globally and to feel more deeply with the whole Society.
- 31 This external development has been accompanied by an increasing awareness of our foundational charism and of SVD spirituality. The Arnold Janssen Spirituality Centre has played an important role in this respect, as has the joint effort of the three congregations founded by Blessed Arnold to collaborate more closely together, with greater unity of objectives and motivation.
- 32 The growth of a community consciousness among the confreres is encouraging, as is the fact that our overall membership is growing

and becoming steadily younger. Nevertheless, in some countries there is both a lack of vocations – especially to the Brotherhood - and an aging membership. Overall, however, the picture of our Society today is positive. There is much that we should be happy about, and we can only thank God for all the blessings bestowed on our Society over the last 125 years.

At the same time we recognize that our international community living is in many ways conditioned by a past which has often been marred by ethnocentrism, clericalism and individualism. We acknowledge that not infrequently our Brothers have been treated unfairly and our indigenous confreres have not been treated as equals. We have sometimes lacked respect for local cultures and religious traditions in our missionary approach, even to the point of disregarding the sovereignty and dignity of the people among whom we have worked. Towards the SSpS Sisters, we have sometimes lacked due respect and fraternal love. For these and other mistakes, in this Jubilee Year 2000, the year of reconciliation, we ask pardon of God and the people concerned.



II Our Call to Mission

34 **T**he changed and changing context of mission makes even more urgent the task of renewing our missionary response. The starting point of such renewal must always be the conviction that mission is first of all the work of God (*Redemptoris Missio* [RM] 24) and that our calling is but a call to share in the mission of the Triune God. By the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit, the Divine Word mediates life to the world and thereby draws us into communion.

1. The Mission of the Triune God: From Creation to New Creation

35 *"In the beginning was the Word...
All things came into being through him,
and without him not one thing came into being"* (*John* 1:1,3).

The Word of God is communication, self-expression and saving event (*Isa* 55: 10-11). Therefore, to attribute the world and all life to its creative agency is to say that creation itself is the beginning of the history of God's self-communication and saving action. This is beautifully portrayed in the opening of *Genesis* with its imagery of the divine Spirit hovering over the formless void, while God's Creating Word carves a universe out of primeval chaos (*Gen* 1:2,3). Its message is clear: God freely creates us and graciously calls us forth to share in the life and love of Creator, Word and Spirit (*Ad Gentes* [AG] 2).

36 But what we have so far experienced of life and love is only a beginning and is always threatened by the forces of chaos, sin and evil. Under

the constant guidance of the Spirit and the light of the Word, the whole of creation is groaning and in labour pains (Rom 8: 18-23) until all is transformed into a new Creation. The author of the Book of Revelation describes the future toward which we strain: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals... they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them'" (Rev 21:1,3).

Others, particularly in the time of Jesus, would have called the object of their hope the Kingdom or Reign of God. This was expressed in the *kaddish*, a synagogue prayer of praise that Jesus would have known from childhood. It is a prayer for the coming of the kingdom that has been recited by the Jewish people for over two thousand years, often in situations of the most dreadful tragedy, cruelty and violence: 37

*"Exalted and hallowed be his great name,
in the world which he created according to his will.
May he let his kingdom rule
in your lifetime and in your days
and in the lifetime of the whole house of Israel
speedily and soon.
Praised be his great name from eternity to eternity..."*

Down through the ages many sages and prophets, humble servants and mighty rulers, wandering tribes and whole nations have expressed a longing for *something beyond* (for examples, read Hebrews 11). This yearning itself is a sign of the Spirit's ceaseless invitation to humanity to become partners in the divine mission. 38

In Luke's Gospel, that history of invitation to partnership in mission reaches a definitive moment when Mary says "yes" to becoming the mother of the Messiah. Just as the life-giving Spirit hovered over the waters at the first creation, the Holy Spirit will come upon her, and the power of the Most High will overshadow her. "Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). The virgin becomes the mother of the Christ who is the new creation of the Spirit. 39

Traditionally, Christians have related the words of the fourth gospel to this moment: "And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14).

- 40 For Luke, therefore, it is clear that the Spirit is *Spiritus vivificans*: the dynamic principle of the New Creation expected in the "last days" (see his redaction of Joel 3:1 at Acts 2:17); and that wherever Jesus is present, there also the Reign of God is making its presence felt as liberating grace (Luke 11:20). The days of Jesus are the days of the Kingdom (Luke 16:16). Conceived through the Spirit's power and anointed with the Spirit at the Jordan (Acts 10:38; Luke 3:22), he manifests the presence of the Spirit struggling with the forces of evil and creating people's lives anew. "Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus . . . was led by the Spirit into the desert" (Luke 4:1) where he struggled with, and overcame, temptations to work wonders that were at odds with the path he had chosen as Servant of the Lord. "In the power of the Spirit" (Luke 4:14), he entered the synagogue at Nazareth and introduced his missionary program with the words "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me." What followed was the good news in terms of liberation, with special reference to the economically and socially poor, the downtrodden, the oppressed and afflicted, the forgotten and the neglected:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring glad tidings to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord"*
(Lk 4:18-19).

- 41 The proclamation meets with rejection in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:28-29). It is a Lukan reminder that Jesus' message is related to his cross. His teaching was certainly perceived to be a threat by the political and religious leadership of his time and was largely misunderstood. He himself was rejected as a blasphemer,

condemned as a criminal, and died a cruel and humiliating death on the cross. But for Luke this was precisely the moment of Jesus' personal 'exodus' (Luke 9:31; 23:46) when he passed over into a larger and fuller experience of the Spirit. Out of this moment, the Christian community would come to life:

*"God raised Jesus
Exalted at the right hand of God,
he received the promise
of the Holy Spirit from the Father
and poured it forth,
as you both see and hear" (Acts 2:32,33).*

2. The Church: Called to Share in the Mission of the Triune God

There is in the New Testament a very close connection between the ⁴² incentive to mission and the gift of the life-giving Spirit that comes from the Risen Lord. In John, it is expressed in the imagery of Christ on Easter Sunday giving the disciples a share in his mission: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." He who died to take away the sin of the world shares with his own his reconciling work (John 20:23). He enlivens them for this by breathing the Spirit into them (John 20:21-22), just as God breathed into the nostrils of Adam and made him "a living being" (Gen 2:7). In Acts, on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit takes hold of Jesus' disciples, vanquishes their fears, and sends them out to bear witness to Jesus as "Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). They announce the dawning of the New Creation in their Risen Lord (see 2 Cor 5:17-19). As with Jesus, so with the Church: the Spirit is the dynamic principle, the inner life, of mission: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Listening to the Spirit determines the direction of

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mission (Acts 1:4; 8:29; 16:7) and its outreach to the non-Jewish world (Acts 10:19; 11:12; 15:28; 21:4).

- 43 From its earliest days, therefore, the Church has understood itself as missionary by its very nature. Through word and sacrament, through prayer and service, it carries the message to the far corners of the earth. Within the broad sweep of God's salvific mission for the world, the Church has an important and irreplaceable role as sacrament and servant of the Reign of God. New communities of disciples come into being. In acknowledging Jesus as Lord and Christ, they are to make the mission program he announced in Nazareth their own (Luke 11:28). The Church promotes love of God, love of neighbour and even love of enemies. It works for human promotion, justice and peace, care for the sick, relief for sufferers (RM 20).
- 44 Because mission is the work of the Triune God, and the Spirit blows where it wills, the Church carries out its service to the Kingdom in collaboration with other faith communities and all people of good will. We are reminded of the metaphors Jesus used to describe how his disciples were to relate to the world around them: salt, light and leaven.
- 45 In reaching out to the world to promote greater communion, the Church is aware that the Reign of God is a reality more extensive than itself (Lumen Gentium [LG] 5). It rejoices that God's saving presence has been, and continues to be, present in the history, cultures and religions of all peoples (RM 28, 29). Through the Spirit's guidance and the Light of the Word, the community of Jesus' disciples is continually invited to venture out beyond its own confines as a visible, historical reality, until the complete communion of our human family is achieved in the banquet of the Reign of God (Isa 25:6; Matt 8:11).

3. The SVD: Called by the Spirit to Share in the Church's Mission

- 46 **T**he Spirit constantly raises up communities which place themselves at the disposal of the Church to help accomplish

her missionary task. 125 years ago, in response to the call of the Spirit and the challenges of his times, Arnold Janssen founded the Society of the Divine Word as a missionary community (Prologue to Constitutions). As followers of the Word, we feel particularly called to go beyond the visible-historical Church, to witness to the gospel where it has not been preached at all or only insufficiently (c. 102), and to seek the light that the Word has enkindled within every person and people. Thus we help to “gather the scattered children of the Lord (John 11:52) and hasten the hour when all will worship the Father in spirit and truth (John 4:23). In this way we promote true human progress, go to meet the Lord as he comes and prepare for his glorious second coming and the final fulfilment of all creation in Christ” (c. 101).

Our call to mission is equally a call to build up among ourselves a community that gives witness to the Reign of God.

We are not the only ones who are called in this way — indeed all 47 members of the Church share in this common vocation. But there are different ways in which the Church lives out her call to mission. So we turn to the Spirit to discern our own specific contribution. In what follows, we express what we recognize as the distinctive emphases in our call as SVDs in today’s world by focusing on three realities: our witnessing to the universality of the Reign of God, our commitment to a fourfold prophetic dialogue in frontier situations, and the characteristic dimensions of our charism.

3.1. SVD Witness to the Reign of God: Universality and Openness

From the time of our Founder we have always felt called to share in 48 the mission of Jesus “to proclaim the Kingdom of God’s love” (Prologue to Constitutions). In our call to pass over to other cultures and in our charism of internationality, the particular contribution that we are called to make in witnessing to the Reign of God is to highlight its universal inclusiveness and its openness to diversity. Indeed our SVD

identity is rooted in this call to bear witness to God's love precisely in situations where its inclusive embrace is not recognized and where its openness to the rich diversity of peoples is not appreciated.

- 49 This particular contribution becomes even more necessary in the light of the globalization that is reshaping our world today. On the one hand, it is a fact that the phenomenon of globalization is not nearly inclusive enough. Many are being excluded and abandoned along the way. The Reign of God is a Reign of Love that includes absolutely everyone. In our commitment, especially to the poor and marginalized, as well as in our own communities, we are called to give witness to this universal embrace of God's love.
- 50 On the other hand, the process of globalization produces in its wake a uniformity that tends to eliminate all differences. It is not nearly open enough to the wide diversity of peoples. The Reign of God is ever open to the particularity of every person and people. In our love of all cultures and peoples, as well as in our appreciation of the diversity in our own communities, we are called to give witness to this open embrace of God's love.
- 51 Our call to witness to the universal and open love of God is not a call to mere activism. Indeed our witness begins with our own experience of the Reign of God in our personal lives and through our life in community (c. 106), and is expressed in our following of the Lord on the path of the evangelical counsels. Our call to mission is, therefore, not only a call to witness to God's Reign through our apostolic service. It is equally a call to build up among ourselves a missionary religious community that gives an ever more credible witness to the Reign of God. In such a community, all of us, including those who are sick or retired, also contribute to mission through prayer and sacrifice.

3.2. Our Primary Missionary Commitments: The Fourfold Prophetic Dialogue

- 52 **O**ur discussions in the Chapter have confirmed that our understanding of *ad gentes* mission has shifted from an

exclusively geographical orientation to one that includes missionary situations. From our constitutions, the work of recent Chapters, as well as the broader context in which our mission is carried out today, we identify four frontier situations where we hear a special call to respond: primary evangelization and re-evangelization, commitment to the poor and marginalized, cross-cultural witness, and interreligious understanding.

There are several ways of articulating this specific call to mission. 53
We believe that the deepest and best understanding of this call is expressed in the term “Dialogue,” or more specifically, “Prophetic Dialogue.” Since Vatican II, dialogue with other religions has been promoted widely as one aspect of the Church’s mission (RM 55). Our specific commitment to this dialogue is reflected in our constitutions (c. 114) and the Statement of the 1988 General Chapter. However, already in the Vatican II documents, the term “dialogue,” in all its richness, is used in a wider meaning to describe our proper attitude toward and relationship with all people. Dialogue is an attitude of “solidarity, respect, and love” (*Gaudium et Spes* [GS] 3) that is to permeate all of our activities. Limited as we are by our personal and cultural viewpoints, none of us has attained the whole truth contained in God and revealed fully in Christ. In dialogue we search together for this truth.

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It is in dialogue that we are able to recognize “the signs of Christ’s 54
presence and the working of the Spirit” (RM 56) in all people, that we are called to acknowledge our own sinfulness and to engage in constant conversion, and that we witness to God’s love by sharing our own convictions boldly and honestly, especially where that love has been obscured by prejudice, violence, and hate. It is clear that we do not dialogue from a neutral position, but out of our own faith. Together with our dialogue partners we hope to hear the voice of the Spirit of God calling us forward, and in this way our dialogue can be called

prophetic. Furthermore, dialogue is not limited to intellectual exchanges. Through the dialogue of life, dialogue of common action for justice and peace, and the dialogue of religious experience it finds expression in all aspects of our lives.

- 55 In the following sections, we suggest some of the ways in which we live out our missionary commitment to prophetic dialogue. In each case, we articulate the challenges to deeper conversion that dialogue entails for our personal lives and for our life in community. Then we mention some of the tasks that we undertake within the local churches. Finally, we indicate the tasks that we undertake together with the local churches as we go out to the world.

3.2.1 ...with People Who Have No Faith Community and with Faith-seekers

- 56 **O**ur call to mission is a call to reach out to faith-seekers and to people who have no community of faith, to engage in primary evangelization and re-evangelization. We include those who have never belonged to a faith community, others who may be alienated from the Church, and still others who may be searching for guidance beyond their own faith tradition. In short, we include all of those people who might welcome an invitation to be disciples of Jesus. We reach out to them in prophetic dialogue because we believe, together with our Founder, that “to proclaim the Good News is the foremost and utmost act of love for neighbour.”
- 57 As we engage in dialogue with people who have no faith community and with faith-seekers, we feel personally called to a continual passing over from unbelief to deeper faith. At the same time, we feel called to cultivate a faith-filled community life more firmly rooted in Jesus Christ, the Living Word of God.
- 58 We respond to this call when we urge the local Church to turn to the world to give witness to the Good News through its presence, its service, its joy and hope. We also encourage local communities

to help the faith-seekers of today feel welcome in the Church. This is especially urgent where the practices and customs of the local Church seem to raise barriers between the community and those who might be invited to follow Jesus.

We respond still more when, together with the local Church, we reach out to those with no religious affiliation. When asked about the reason for our hope (1 Pet 3:15), we are ready to share how Jesus' life, death and resurrection have helped us find deeper meaning for our lives. If they respond with interest, we invite them to become Jesus' disciples and we welcome them to share in the ongoing mission of witnessing to the Reign of God. 59

3.2.2 ...with People Who Are Poor and Marginalized

Our call to mission is a call to prophetic dialogue with the poor and the marginalized of our world in seeking to promote integral human development. At Nazareth, Jesus indicated that he had come to bring good news to the poor, release to captives, sight to the blind and freedom to the oppressed. Surely, those who are materially poor are always among the first to suffer oppression, but myriad other reasons (gender, race, appearance, physical ability, age, politics, educational attainment, etc.) have been used to justify marginalization and oppression. Today, attentive to the Word and Spirit of God and together with the poor and marginalized, we face the realities of oppression in our Church and in our world as we work for greater freedom. 60

We help to develop structures whereby the poor are active subjects in their Church communities.

In committing ourselves to prophetic dialogue with the poor and marginalized, we come to a deeper understanding that "our struggle is not only against famine, ignorance and the denial of human rights but especially against the sinfulness of the human heart which is at 61

the root of the oppressive structures and systems that cause these evils” (c. 112.2). Our vow of poverty should make us particularly sensitive to their situation. We are personally called to continually pass over from egoism to solidarity. As brothers to one another we cultivate a genuinely fraternal community life that allows all confreres — young and old, Brothers and clerics, superiors and members — a full share in the life and decision making of the community.

- 62 We respond to this call by promoting the full participation of the poor and marginalized within the local Churches. We help to develop structures whereby they are not merely passive observers, but rather active subjects in their Church communities. Like Peter and Paul in the early Church, we encourage solidarity within and between Church communities so that the needs of all can be met.
- 63 We respond still more when, together with the local Churches, we struggle to empower the poor and marginalized to grow toward greater well-being and full human dignity. We strive to see the world through their eyes and, empowered by them, join in their struggle against unjust social structures and the abuse of power. We build bridges of solidarity among all people, regardless of economic and social position, and we help to develop new patterns of communion inspired by the Reign of God.

3.2.3 ...with People of Different Cultures

- 64 **O**ur call to mission is a call to prophetic dialogue with people of different cultures so as to learn from and share in the diversity of gifts given by the God of Life. We also recognize that all cultures need redemption from elements of sin and death. As witnesses to God’s Reign, we promote a life-giving encounter between the Gospel and the particular cultural and multicultural milieus.
- 65 Our prophetic dialogue with people of other cultures requires a continual personal conversion, a dying to ethnocentrism and racism

and a passing over to a more catholic spirit of appreciation of the other's cultural identity. The pain and joy of learning a new language and of entering into the culture of the people with whom we work allows us a small share in the dying and rising of Christ. We acknowledge that our life in international/intercultural communities is sometimes marred by misunderstanding and prejudice, and so we commit ourselves anew to witness to God's inclusive love in our own relations with each other.

We respond to this call by encouraging the process of inculturation 66 within the local Churches so that the Good News becomes an integral part of a people's way of life. In turn, the impulses emerging from the different cultures influence the interpretation of the Gospel. The principal agent for inculturation is the local community. It requires a close listening to the needs of the community and an invitation to its members to make their own the way of life revealed in Jesus Christ. Acceptance of the invitation transforms people's values, attitudes and actions, which in turn find expression in inculturated ways of faith life.

Prophetic dialogue with people of other cultures and religions requires a continual personal conversion.

We respond still more by working together with the local Churches 67 to contribute to the immense task of promoting life-giving values of the local cultures. In this way the local Churches help to enrich the cultural heritage of all the people, Christians and followers of other religious and secular traditions.

3.2.4 ...with People of Different Religious Traditions and Secular Ideologies

Our call to mission is a call to be more committed to prophetic 68 dialogue with the other Christian Churches, with followers of other religious traditions, and with people committed to diverse ideologies. Together with all these dialogue partners we hope to

hear the voice of the Spirit of God calling us forward in service. Our commitment to such dialogue is especially important where Catholics are in the majority. Otherwise we might rightly be suspected of promoting dialogue merely as a “tactic” for those situations where Catholics are less numerous.

- 69 We recognize that it is difficult to initiate and sustain prophetic dialogue with people of other faith traditions and ideologies, and so it seems ever more urgent to personally cultivate in ourselves attitudes of passing over from suspicion to trust. At the same time, we are called to foster a welcoming community life that embraces diverse styles of prayer and religious expression and that fosters collaboration.
- 70 We respond to this call by encouraging the members of each local Church to cultivate attitudes of tolerance, openness and respect towards one another and towards those who follow other religious and ideological traditions.
- 71 We respond still more when, together with the local Church, we seek ways to collaborate with people of other traditions and ideologies. We promote religious tolerance, mutual respect and understanding, freedom of conscience, and a better appreciation of shared human and spiritual values. We work together on common projects, especially those that respond to the demands for genuine peace and integral human development. Sometimes we are even graced with opportunities to share our experience of the Transcendent in a dialogue of prayer.

3.3. Characteristic Dimensions of SVD Missionary Response

- 72 **I**n seeking to deepen our self-understanding, we have come to recognise some “characteristic dimensions” of our missionary life and service. We use the term “characteristic dimensions” to speak of those elements in our call that can be likened to family traits. At different times these matters have been variously referred to as “priorities,” “areas,” and more recently “essential dimensions.” Our widening

experience of and deepening reflection on these concerns has prompted the changes in terminology.

In our use of the term, we include four matters which have received special attention in the recent history of our Society and have been given a clearer institutional profile through the appointment of provincial, zonal and generalate coordinators. These are: Bible Apostolate (cc. 106-108), Mission Animation (cc. 109-111), JPIC or Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (c.112), and Communication (c.115). 73

Our characteristic dimensions invite us to deepen our experience of the Divine Word in multiple ways. We get to know the Biblical Word whose story is told in Scriptures. We proclaim the Animating Word who calls everyone to share in mission. We commit ourselves to the Prophetic Word who announces peace, justice and the transformation of all creation. We share the Communicating Word who seeks only to be poured out in self-giving love. 74

The characteristic dimensions are the mark of every SVD.

Three further observations need to be made to help us appreciate better the significance of the notion of characteristic dimensions in our call to mission. 75

Firstly, although emphasis on characteristic dimensions has already helped many confreres and provinces to gain a renewed focus on their missionary service and thus have a clearer profile in some local Churches, these dimensions are not sufficient to express SVD mission. Our commitment to the fourfold prophetic dialogue is still more fundamental to our *ad gentes* missionary charism. In fact, the dimensions are more clearly “missionary” when set in the context of the fourfold prophetic dialogue. 76

Secondly, the characteristic dimensions are not the preserve of specialists, but the mark of every SVD. While it is certainly true 77

that each of the dimensions can be given expression in one or more specialized ministries (Bible Centre, communications ministry, etc.), they are just as truly “characteristic” for other SVDs. Whether confreres work in a parish, school, or specific apostolate, whether they are administrators or students, whether they are at the beginning of a life of missionary service or near its end, their life and work ought to bear the marks of the Biblical, Animating, Prophetic and Communicating Word.

- 78 Finally, the characteristic dimensions are not only for our apostolic service. While they certainly are gifts we want to share in all of our activities, they are at least as important for our own community life. Precisely as Divine Word Missionaries we seek to share the Bible together, to animate one another, to be just and at peace with one another, and to communicate with one another in fraternal love.





Gathering together our reflections on the context of mission 79 today, in the light of Scripture and the specific understanding of our call, we choose the following directions for our missionary activities in the coming years. We do not intend to review all of our work and activities, but we single out those areas that seem to be particularly urgent for our mission today. Obviously, what is said here will need to be further contextualized by the zones, provinces/regions, and local communities. The indications we give come under three general headings: Responding to Contemporary Challenges, Strengthening Our Existing Commitments, and Renewing Our Internal Resources.

1. Responding to Contemporary Challenges

Our rapidly changing world confronts us with many new 80 challenges: globalization, urbanization, migration, the ongoing quest for liberation, and the impact all these have on the consciousness and the lives of people. There are new situations in which we feel called to give witness to the Reign of God. The following areas present themselves as possibilities for renewed commitment or new initiatives:

Racism. Given the rise of racism in so many parts of the world and 81 the certainty that we too are affected by it, we commit ourselves to confronting racism within ourselves as individuals, within the Society, and wherever else it exists.

Integrity of Creation. We recognize that one of the newest areas 82 of missionary concern is that of working for the integrity of creation.

In the light of today's ecological crisis, our concern for the well-being of future generations leads us to commit ourselves to working for a sustainable environment and to adopting a way of life that witnesses to the importance of environmental concerns.

- 83 ***Interfaith and Ecumenical Collaboration.*** Increased interfaith and ecumenical collaboration is vital for the future of our world. As *ad gentes* missionaries, we are grateful for opportunities to share in dialogue and we commit ourselves to promoting such encounters. Therefore we recommend that the provinces and regions participate regularly in interreligious and ecumenical activities and that the members of the Society pray often and publicly for God's blessing on peoples of other faith traditions.
- 84 ***Urban Ministry.*** Statistics indicate that cities will contain the majority of the world's population in the next twenty years. Thus, we need to commit more of our personnel and resources for urban ministry, especially among the youth, the poor, the marginalized, and indeed among all who are spiritually searching. Our ministry in urban areas does not need to be limited to present parish structures. Urban ministry should become a focus of our initial and ongoing formation programs.
- 85 ***Women.*** The place and role of women in the Church as well as in the larger society, particularly their participation in decision-making, is an area of concern for us. We commit ourselves to working for equality between women and men. We also continue our efforts to work even more cooperatively with our sister congregations, the Sister Servants of the Holy Spirit and the Sister Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration. We resolve to extend our cooperation with women (whether religious or lay) beyond the scope of our Arnoldus family.
- 86 ***Migrants, Refugees, and Displaced People.*** Many in our world today are forced to flee their land and country because of political, military and other conflicts. Others migrate in search of a better economic life. Whether forced or free, refugees, displaced people, and migrants are

of particular concern to us. We call on the provinces and regions as well as the generalate, to continue, in cooperation with others already involved in this work, to organize a response to the situation of refugees, displaced people, and migrants.

Media. We encourage media education and the use of the means of communication to foster alternative values based on the Holy Scriptures and a sense of the Transcendent. This will also counteract the frequently negative impact of the mass media, which sometimes denies religious and human values. Furthermore, innovations like electronic mail and the internet should be explored as new means to proclaim the Gospel. SVD websites should be established that offer an evangelizing presence on the internet. 87

HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS is a tragedy of global proportions, decimating generations and destroying the economic infrastructure of entire countries. Its spread is abetted by situations of poverty, lack of availability of funds for proper medical care, and drug abuse, but most particularly by ignorance and by reluctance to discuss sexual matters, whether for cultural or religious reasons. Confreres need to be aware of the rapid rate at which the HIV/AIDS crisis is escalating, and be prepared to take action in the very early stages of the spread of the disease. We should cooperate in awareness-raising and the correction of misinformation, cultivating an atmosphere of frankness in dealing with the issue. We should also increase our efforts of support for those affected by this epidemic, helping to overcome the stigma that is frequently attached to the disease. 88

Increased interfaith
and ecumenical
collaboration is
vital for the future
of our world.

2. Strengthening Our Existing Commitments

While we must find ways to respond to new challenges, we also need to look at our existing commitments in a new way, 89

one prompted by the changing times and by our continuing reflection on what our charism calls us to do.

- 90 ***Mission Statements.*** Our constitutions spell out how we are to live and work as SVD missionaries. However, as we are involved in various kinds of mission at different times and places, there is a need to formulate specific goals and plans. We call on the provinces and regions to develop or update mission statements and action plans. These should be made a point of dialogue in the regular interaction within the zones and between the generalate and the provinces and regions, especially in making appointments of confreres and in general visitations.
- 91 ***Parish Ministry.*** Our latest statistics show that a large number of SVDs are involved in parish ministry. We recognize and appreciate their work and encourage our provinces and regions to make specific efforts to clarify and enhance the missionary profile of the parishes where we work. This would include promoting our fourfold prophetic dialogue and characteristic dimensions, and fostering the process of inculturation. We encourage teamwork and collaborative ministry within the SVD. Where possible, the development of pastoral teams in which the Sister Servants of the Holy Spirit and the laity would also play a vital role is encouraged.
- 92 Pastoral boards within provinces and regions can help foster coordinated planning among SVDs in parishes, and provide a venue for regular reflection and evaluation. Where helpful, we recommend that these boards be established.
- 93 To foster a harmonious and professional relationship with the local ordinary, we enjoin our provinces and regions to continue to work out contracts with local bishops regarding SVD service in parishes. Such contracts should indicate the specifically missionary contribution we hope to give through our work.
- 94 ***Ministry among Indigenous Peoples.*** We continue our missionary presence among indigenous peoples. Through prophetic dialogue

and the process of inculturation, we unite with them in their struggle for their land, culture, language, and identity. We continue to look for ways to help them bring about their overall development. We commit ourselves to learning their languages and culture as we work for the growth of indigenous Churches.

The Laity. We recognize that the increasingly prominent and active 95
role of the laity in the Church is a positive development. We feel the
need to be honest and humble in reflecting on
our own relationship with the laity and the
quality of our collaboration with all men and
women of goodwill. Whenever possible, in the
institutions in our provinces and regions, lay
persons should be invited to assume leadership
positions that do not need to be limited to SVD
members. We gladly share our spirituality with
those with whom we work, especially with
those who associate themselves more closely
with our mission.

We join all men
and women of
goodwill and
pledge to work to
promote a culture
of life.

Culture of Life. The tragic irony of the modern world is that as science 96
and technology find different ways to improve life, they are also
used to promote death. Against this growing culture of death, we
join all men and women of goodwill and pledge to work to promote
a culture of life. We oppose all threats to human life including unjust
economic structures, genocide, capital punishment and torture, and
we strongly support efforts to protect lives where they are most at
risk.

Family Ministry and Mission Animation. Constitution 109.1 enjoins 97
us to devote much care to the education and formation of truly Christian
families so that they may be open to the needs of the church and the
world. Especially in these times when family values are being
threatened and many families are breaking up, we stress the importance
of family ministry. By this we mean not only that we minister to
families and their needs, but that the family members themselves are
missionaries, a “domestic church” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 11; LG

11). Indeed, we can say that in some sense, like the Universal Church, the family is “missionary by its very nature” (AG 2). In this way, it is a powerful witness to the Good News and becomes our partner in mission animation. We therefore encourage all confreres to consider how to make the family a partner in mission animation.

3. *Renewing Our Internal Resources*

- 98 ***F*ormation.** We are grateful to God for sending us many vocations worldwide. In response to this blessing, we must invest in our personnel by offering excellent programs of initial and ongoing formation that are consistent with our specific call to missionary service.
- 99 We recommend that all provinces and regions review their programs for language learning and their orientation programs for new and returning missionaries. Through these programs, the former are able to truly insert themselves into the actual situation of those among whom they work (c. 103), and the latter can re-enter more easily into their own culture.
- 100 ***S*pirituality.** At the heart of our missionary work is our spirituality. We are reminded that “Missionary activity demands a specific spirituality,” and that “the renewed impulse to mission *ad gentes* demands holy missionaries” (RM 87, 90). We describe our call to share in God’s mission as a call to a fourfold prophetic dialogue, and this requires of us a profound openness to God. So we follow Jesus’ example and cultivate this through silence, meditation, and prayer.
- 101 We recommend that, in collaboration with our two sister congregations, our Society continue to foster the growth of the Arnold Janssen Spirituality Centre, and that we encourage it to further develop and articulate our spiritual heritage. We also recommend that provincial and regional superiors and their councils actively support and promote the development and activities of the provincial spiritual animation teams.

Community. Our community, composed of Brothers and clerics from different nations and cultures, is called to be a living symbol of the unity and diversity of the Church and of the Reign of God. Indeed it has often served as a genuine school for dialogue. To maintain such an atmosphere, we need to constantly renew our commitment to build up a community that is faith-filled, welcoming, international/intercultural and fraternal. In this way, we already begin to live out in community our commitment to the fourfold prophetic dialogue. 102

Some of our provinces have a larger aging membership, and some older confreres return from the provinces where they have ministered for much of their lives to spend the evening of life in their home provinces. Often confreres are insufficiently prepared for the changes they experience at this time. This causes difficulties for them and their respective communities. Confreres should be encouraged to “let go” and to age gracefully. Provincial and regional superiors should take action to prepare these confreres for this important moment. Confreres should be encouraged to decide well in advance where and how they would like to spend their retirement years, as well as to settle the details of their living will, durable power of attorney (where possible and necessary), and funeral. At the same time, provinces should train confreres capable of accompanying and directing our elderly. 103

Whether forced or free, refugees, displaced people, and migrants are of particular concern to us.

Brothers. Knowing the importance of Brothers in our society, we recommend that all levels of administration continue their efforts to foster knowledge about the Brother vocation and promote its development in the Society. We recommend further that Brothers be encouraged to choose, and to become professionally competent in, ministries which are directly part of the fourfold prophetic dialogue and of the characteristic dimensions of our SVD commitment. 104

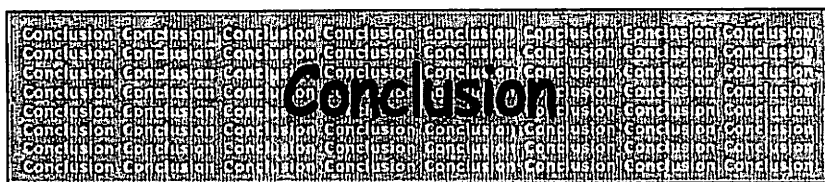
Mission Research. As members of the SVD, we are heirs to a valuable, multi-disciplinary tradition of mission research. The 105

changing situation of mission challenges our various research institutes and all SVD mission researchers to be in very close collaboration, and to focus their study and teaching on concrete issues that can help improve our missionary service, and make it responsive to present needs.

106 We recommend that the generalate, together with the provinces and regions, assure that funding and personnel are committed to mission research. They should especially support those projects which promote cooperation among the different SVD research institutes.

107 **Financial Self-Reliance.** As our Society continues to grow and to undertake new missionary initiatives, the need for greater financial resources also grows apace. So far, we have been able to meet the basic needs of our Society because of the sustained generosity of our benefactors, the financial solidarity among provinces, and the conscientious administration of our temporal goods by our treasurers. But we know from painful experience that too great a reliance on foreign funds can lead to missionary praxis that is out of touch with the real local situation. Every confrere and community should contribute to financial self-reliance by living our religious commitment (c. 213), bearing in mind the principle of accountability. We recommend that provinces and regions continue to take concrete steps toward financial self-reliance as a goal, not only in the administration of temporal goods but also in our mission practice.





As we conclude the 15th General Chapter and turn a new page 108
in the history of our Society, we face the future with
confidence. Once again we place ourselves and our Society entirely
under the guidance and direction of the Spirit, convinced that
mission is by its very nature his work and revelation (c. 105).

Indeed we need to continue to listen to the Spirit so as to know 109
and do the will of the Triune God. We are convinced that when we
enter into dialogue with others, we surrender ourselves to God.
Whether for a minute, an hour, a day or a lifetime, whenever we
give ourselves to others, we become a gift to them and to God.
And God, who dwells in them as he dwells in us, becomes in turn
a gift for us all. So, joyfully, we unite ourselves with the founding
generation and all disciples of Jesus in renewing our commitment
to be hope-filled witnesses to the Good News of God's Reign.

We know that today's missionary challenges are enormous and 110
that often our response is utterly inadequate. At the same time,
however, we realize that mission is fundamentally God's work.
Thus we take heart in confessing that the coming Reign of God
"is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision. We
cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing
that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well"
(attributed to Archbishop Oscar Romero).

111
So, as we begin to face the challenges of the new millennium,
midway through this Jubilee Year 2000, we give thanks to Jesus
Christ for calling us to be his disciples. We gladly bear his name as
Divine Word Missionaries and we give thanks that "*his life is our
life, his mission our mission*" (Prologue to Constitutions).

Nemi, 14 July 2000