

GUIDE FOR LAY SPIRITAN ASSOCIATES

CONGREGATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT - 2016



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2016

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I. INTRODUCTION

“In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19).”¹

In the light of the Second Vatican Council, Christians have a keen awareness that mission is not a particular activity in the Church, but is its essence. Each one, according to his/her charism and situation, in a Church recognised as “the People of God”, is co-responsible for announcing the good news of Jesus Christ.² Laity³, in virtue of their situation “at the heart of the world”, see themselves with an eminent role in this duty of evangelisation and are given as their territory: *“the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, but also the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media. It also includes other realities which are open to evangelization, such as human love, the family, the education of children and adolescents, professional work, suffering.”⁴*

At the start of the 21st century, we recognize that the charism is not the property of an institution but a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church. The Lord’s Spirit is continually opening new ways for mission to be shared reciprocally with the laity:” *Today, often as a result of new situations, many Institutes have come to the conclusion that their charism can be shared with the laity. The laity are therefore invited to share more intensely in the spirituality and mission of these Institutes. (...) a new chapter, rich in hope, has*

¹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 120, 2013.

² Cf. John-Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* Chap. III, 1988.

³ In this document, “Laity” reflects the definition given in the Catechism of the Catholic Church 897 and *Lumen Gentium* 31, which states : *“all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church.”* Therefore, this guide does not refer to the Spiritan brothers (who are *canonically* lay persons). However, occasionally, non-professed ordained ministers (deacons or priests) may belong to a group of Lay Spiritans; in that case, the guide also applies to them in the reality of their situation.

⁴ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 70, 1975.

begun in the history of relations between consecrated persons and the laity."⁵

The association with us of lay men and women in diverse ways belongs to the tradition of our Congregation. From the foundation of the Seminary of the Holy Spirit, we find collaborators who participate in the running of the house and vow themselves to poverty and community life according to the Rule (there were then no private vows for either clerics or laity). Fr. Libermann admitted Dr. Brunet to join the mission to Reunion. Later, this is more formalised: the Constitutions of 1875 recognise two kind of membership: "*affiliés*" and "*agrégés*". In 1895, at the request of Mgr. Leroy, the General Council approved the principle of admitting married laity as associates.⁶

After Vatican II, the wish expressed by certain lay people to participate in the missionary work and prayer-life of Spiritan communities was taken as inspired by the Spirit.

Since 1968⁷, each General Chapter encouraged initiatives in this matter, assigning to the circumscriptions the task of giving them a structure and thus facilitating reflection on the matter in the Congregation.

The 1987 SRL states that the Congregation welcomes "with joy" these collaborators and invites them to share the two basic elements of our vocation: our spirituality and our apostolate, with this commitment being confirmed by a written Agreement (SRL 24.3; 246.1.19).

The Chapters of Maynooth (1998) and Torre d'Aguilha (2004) find in the "branch of the Spiritan tree", which is the laity, three main shoots, according to the forms of commitment and participation in the

⁵ John-Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* 54, 1996.

⁶ Cf.: Henry Koren, *Spiritane lay associates*, in : *Essays on the Spiritan charism and on Spiritan history* . Spiritus Press, Bethel Park, USA, 1990, pp 89-97.

⁷ Cf. Directives and Decisions 14b, 1968-69.

common mission: support for missionary work; spiritual companionship; life commitment.

Finally the Bagamoyo Chapter (2012) adopted the term ‘‘Lay Spiritan Associate’’ and suggested moving from the notion of ‘‘contract’’ (which is juridical) to the category of ‘‘covenant’’ as being more dynamic, spiritual and anchored in human experience. This same assembly requested the elaboration of a guide to clarify the status of lay people in the Congregation and which would define the forms of association.

The Congregation today values this rich heritage and recognises the challenge of managing diversity⁸ so as to finally arrive at a common vision. This *Guide*, being both inspirational (2. Vision – 3. Mission) and structural (4. Forms of engagement – 5. Formation – 6. Organisational elements), seeks to contribute to meeting this challenge.

⁸ Cf. Bagamoyo 2.13. In this diversity we can also include volunteers, youth groups, alumni, benefactors, etc.; they constitute potentially other forms of association, requiring creativity and openness, and we can see here a call of the Spirit. However this guide is directed towards organized groups as defined in 4.2

II. VISION

“O Divine Spirit, I want to be before you like a light feather, so that your breath may carry me where it wills, and so that I do not offer it the least resistance.” (F. Libermann: Commentary on the Gospel of John – 3:8)

2.1 The driving factor of our Spiritan vocation is evangelical availability to respond to the Spirit who speaks to us in the concrete situations of life.⁹ We wish to listen to the same Spirit, who speaks to us through our contemporaries and makes us open to his calls.

2.2 The Spirit inspires and invites us – both professed and lay Spiritans – to become community, united as one heart and one soul, to share deeply what constitutes our lives, our mission and our spirituality.

2.3 The “common soul” which animates and unites us is characterised by a life of prayer and community, with a commitment to defending the weak and the poor.¹⁰ It is a form of sharing, as laity, in the building up of the Kingdom of God. It presupposes on our part openness, respect, dialogue, simplicity and hospitality.

2.4 The source of our inspiration is the vision of our founders, Claude-Francois Poullart des Places and François Libermann, nourished and renewed by the living tradition of the Congregation. We recognise in the Spiritan charism a “treasure to be shared”¹¹, which is not reserved solely for professed members. We must take care not to hide this light under a bushel: we all feel, with the

⁹ H. Koren, *ibid.*, p 94.

¹⁰ Torre d’Aguilha 11.3.

¹¹ Information-Documentation 57, 2000.

encouragement of Pope Francis, “called to share in the same charismatic reality” and to share ideals, spirit and mission.¹²

2.5 Whether lay or professed, what binds us is a dynamic of “covenant”, blessed and strengthened by the Spirit. It expresses itself in fidelity, humility, forgiveness, reciprocity and solidarity.

2.6 Together we form “but one family, intent on one mission” (SRL 24.2), in which there is a commitment to a greater fruitfulness, with no hierarchy, but with our diversity and complementarity. This synergy “helps to give a clearer and more complete picture of the Church herself, while rendering more effective the response to the great challenges of our time, thanks to the combined contributions of the various gifts.”¹³ In some places, this mutually enriching relationship extends to other congregations that share the same Spiritan charism.

2.7 The Congregation derives from this reciprocal alliance a renewed missionary enthusiasm; the Spiritan charism appears in a new light and in all its richness; the know-how, professionalism and creativity of lay people opening up new paths.¹⁴

¹² Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis to all consecrated persons, III. 1, 2014.

¹³ Vita Consecrata 54, 1996.

¹⁴ Cf Vita Consecrata 55; Torre d’Aguilha 11.1.

III. MISSION

“All of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel.” (Evangelii Gaudium 20)

3.1 Our mission comes from God, proceeding from the example of Jesus Christ and his irresistible call to follow him. We live our Christian vocation by sharing the charism, the spirituality and mission of the Congregation. We try to respond to the challenges of the present day, each according to his/her personality, history and talents. Set in the heart of the world, we are aware of our responsibility: we offer to the world the witness of our apostolate, of our prayer and of our community.

3.2 OUR APOSTOLATE

3.2.1 In all circumstances of our life, we want to adopt a profoundly missionary attitude, based on humility, availability, respect, a spirit of welcome and hospitality, a spirit of service and openness to others – all elements of a “Spiritan culture”.¹⁵ We allow ourselves to be challenged and taken out of our comfort-zones. We offer our talents and aptitudes for the benefit of the common mission.

3.2.2 “The evangelisation of the poor is our purpose” (SRL 4; ND XIII, 170): our life, our activity and our witness as members of the Spiritan family must really be “good news“ for those we meet in the circumstances of their lives. Our apostolate demands firstly that we identify who are the “poor” today.¹⁶

¹⁵ Bagamoyo 2.10.7.

¹⁶ Bagamoyo 1.3.

3.2.3 As members of a Church which “goes forth”, the Spirit urges us to go beyond frontiers.¹⁷ Our insertion at the heart of things allows us reach the peripheries. We look in particular towards the world of youth (a new continent), of migrants, the marginalised, the excluded, and those separated from the Church. We stress also kinds of service and groups for which the Church has difficulty in finding labourers (SRL 4).

3.2.4 Our apostolate can find expression in the normal circumstances of our lives (local, professional, the voluntary sector), or is attached to a particular project of the Spiritan circumscription. In this latter case, it may involve lay people only or be a work of collaboration with professed confreres.

3.2.5 This involves engaging in various works, such as the following: an explicit proclamation of the Gospel; supporting human communities, particularly those situated on the margins of society; the promotion of justice, peace and integrity of creation locally and at the global level; dialogue between people of different generations, cultures and religions; the world of education.

3.2.6 Whether it be an original individual initiative or involvement in a work of the circumscription, our apostolic activity is always in line with the projects and priorities of the Spiritan family and, particularly, of the circumscription (SRL 21). It is the result of close collaboration with the circumscription, which confirms, supports and attempts to guarantee its viability.

¹⁷ Cf Evangelii Gaudium 20-24, 2013.

3.3 OUR PRAYER

3.3.1 *“In all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization.”*¹⁸

The Holy Spirit, who leads us in prayer and gets us moving forward, is “the principal agent of evangelisation”¹⁹: our spirituality is fundamentally missionary; our prayer is a reflection of our mission.

3.3.2 An authentic relationship with God implies a dynamic relationship between prayer and activity, which promotes Christian commitment in the service of others. Following Libermann we live this tension between prayer and action that is inherent in all Christian life in a “practical union”, a habitual state of fidelity to the promptings of the Holy Spirit (SRL 88).

3.3.3 Our prayer draws upon various sources: listening to the word of God, reflection with the Church, the intuitions of our founders. We reflect on global trends in the contemporary world to discern the signs of the times. We are also open to the inspiration given by other spiritual traditions.

3.3.4 Our commitment to prayer is shown in personal and communal prayer, sharing in the prayer of the Church, and especially the Eucharist, through meditation and scripture sharing, together with moments for retreat.

3.3.5 In all aspects of our life, and especially in our prayer, Mary is our model of responsiveness and courage in fidelity to all the inspirations of the Holy Spirit (SRL 89).

¹⁸ Evangelii Gaudium 119.

¹⁹ Evangelii Nuntiandi 75, 1975.

3.4 OUR COMMUNITY

3.4.1 Where we have the good fortune to be several Lay Spiritan Associates living in a relative proximity, our group forms a real community of disciples, united by the same calling and care for the common mission, and where our sense of belonging to the Spiritan family opens up and sees in action our motto of “one heart and one spirit”.

3.4.2 As Lay Spiritan Associates wishing to promote evangelical fraternity, this presupposes that we live it, firstly, in our own group. This is for us a place of sharing, discernment, inspiration and mutual encouragement. It’s in this community space that the talents of each one are expressed, together with our diversity and complementarity. Responsibilities are fulfilled as a service there. The solidarity between us shows itself in friendly, spiritual support and if circumstances allow, in material support too.

3.4.3 Each one of us, individually or in a group according to geographic circumstances, is in close liaison with a community of professed members. This relationship demonstrates and sustains our common belonging to the Spiritan family. In some cases, Lay Spiritans involved in the same missionary project form community with professed members.

3.4.4 We keep contact with one another, within one circumscription and between circumscriptions. We seek to make known the richness of this form of missionary commitment beyond the limits of our own group.

3.4.5 Our family is our first community and remains the priority in our discernment and choices: and this can never suffer from our commitment as Lay Spiritan Associates.

IV. FORMS OF ENGAGEMENT

“Spiritans laity are a branch of the Spiritan tree.” (Torre d’Aguilha 11.2)

“Terminology defining the various forms of relationship in the Congregation shall be included in the Guide.” (Bagamoyo 2.14)

4.1 The Congregation of the Holy Spirit welcomes joyfully various forms of association, commitment, spiritual proximity and co-responsibility in mission with laity, young and old, men and women, celibates or married people.

4.2 At recent General Chapters, the Congregation has recognized three main levels of relationship within the Spiritan family:²⁰

- **Spiritans Friends:** organized groups that, in different ways, support our communities and collaborate in our mission.
- **Spiritans Fraternities:** groups of lay people who feel attracted by the spirituality of our founders and our mission, and who come together for prayer, reflection and action.
- **Lay Spiritans,** who feel a call to lead their whole life according to the Spiritan charism and show this by a deeper commitment within the Congregation. After a time of discernment and specific formation, they establish with the circumscription which welcomes them, a written Agreement (SRL 24.3; 246.1.19).

4.3 Whether it’s a question of one or other of the above categories, the links with the Congregation, the degree of participation in the apostolate, in community and in prayer take different forms. They also vary according to the project of each particular group, the missionary project of the circumscription and local circumstances.

²⁰ Maynooth 4.21; Torre d’Aguilha 11.2.

4.4 SPIRITAN FRIENDS

4.4.1 Spiritan Friends have in common a practical mission in a particular place, in an organized group, in collaboration with professed Spiritans and inspired by the living tradition of the Congregation.

4.4.2 They are set up in missionary groups, youth movements, volunteer groups, groups supporting vocations, etc. They can also form around a local community or a particular project.

4.4.3 A group can include in its project material support for the Spiritan mission, especially taking part in fund-raising efforts; however it cannot be created solely for financial purposes: it is always a place for sharing our spirituality and mission.

4.4.4 Setting up a group can be done by the laity themselves, by Spiritan confrères, by a circumscription or even by a Union. In any case, it is up to the circumscription (or the Union) to approve the group's existence and to always ensure its Spiritan identity.

4.4.5 Those in charge in a circumscription appoint a confrère to accompany the group.

4.4.6 The internal organisation, the specific objectives, conditions for admission, as well as the formation programme, are worked out by the group and must be approved by the circumscription council. It is a matter of collaboration, generally involving professed confrères, and in response to the nature and particular needs of the group.

4.4.7 If circumstances require it, the circumscription council, after dialogue with those concerned, can demand the dismissal of a member or even the dissolution of the group – or at least terminate its Spiritan connection.

4.5 SPIRITAN FRATERNITIES

4.5.1 Spiritan Fraternities are groups of lay people who, inspired by our founders, wish together to deepen their life as baptised people, support their spiritual development and so take part actively in the universal mission of the Church, in union with other members of the Spiritan family.

4.5.2 Each member of the Fraternities commits to living mission where (s)he is, according to the main principles of Spiritan spirituality and to work to develop in that particular local Church the sense of being part of the universal Church.

4.5.3 At circumscription level, local Fraternities are grouped in an association which works out its own statutes, its manner of functioning and which chooses its own leaders. It normally has a large level of autonomy in its manner of living; however, the setting up of local Fraternities and the association statutes are subject to the approval of the Spiritan circumscription council.

4.5.4 The leadership appoints a pastoral assistant, a professed Spiritan or a sister closely associated to our charism, to guide each local Fraternity and who takes care to ensure its Spiritan authenticity.

4.5.5 Conditions for admission are specified in the statutes of association. Generally, after a defined time of mutually getting to know each other, a person can ask for admission to a local Fraternity. The decision on this belongs to the local leadership, having consulted members and the pastoral assistant. Such an admission is the occasion of a special celebration, which allows each of the members to renew expression of their fidelity to the Holy Spirit within the Fraternity.

4.5.6 If circumstances require it, the circumscription council, after dialogue with the parties concerned, can require the dismissal of a member or even the dissolution of a Fraternity.

4.6 Lay SPIRITANS

4.6.1 The life commitment, which singles out “Lay Spiritans” and is made official by an Agreement, presupposes particular dispositions, clarified at circumscription level (SRL 24.3).

4.6.2 Some discernment criteria: maturity (to have reached majority according to the local norm); emotional balance; personal qualities compatible with the mission and community; a regular link of sufficient duration with a Spiritan community; references (from Spiritans, clergy, religious, lay leaders); financial autonomy; and, for married persons, explicit agreement of one’s spouse if they are not joining as a couple.

4.6.3 A trial period, allowing for accompaniment and mutual acquaintance, takes place within the group of Lay Spiritans, if such exists, with a reference Spiritan community and with the designated professed accompanier.

4.6.4 Entry to the formation programme is decided on by the circumscription superior and his council, having received the opinion of other Lay Spiritans and the accompanier.

4.6.5 Initial commitment is generally for 3 years; so also its renewal. It takes place at the end of initial formation. It is celebrated publicly during an appropriate liturgical ceremony and formalised by a written Agreement, which expresses a covenant, a spiritual link rooted in mission, without legal or canonical implications for either party (SRL 24.3).²¹

4.6.6 After a certain time, according to local practice, there can be a definitive commitment, which has no legal consequence for either party.

4.6.7 Every commitment, whether initial, renewed or definitive, is decided upon by the circumscription superior with

²¹ When available, examples of written Agreement will be found at the Congregation’s website (www.spiritanroma.org).

the agreement of his council, having received the opinion of other Lay Spiritans and of the accompanier (SRL 246.1.19).

4.6.8 A specific mission, entrusted to a Lay Spiritan can be integrated into the circumscription's project. In such a case, the details are worked out collaboratively. In many situations, the charism of the Congregation can be made present through everyday personal or group commitments (professional, voluntary sector, etc.).

4.6.9 A Lay Spiritan can at any time bring to an end his/her commitment: reasons for this are to be explained in writing. Likewise, the circumscription council, after consultation with the Lay Spiritans group, has the right at any time to dismiss a member, if circumstances require it. This decision must be communicated in writing to the person concerned.

4.6.10 A professed confrère is named by the leadership of the circumscription to accompany Lay Spiritans.²² His appointment is made after consultation with the group of laity. He does not exercise a leadership role, which belongs to a Lay Spiritan; his role is rather that of a friend, advisor, guide. He also seeks to maintain the Spiritan identity of the group and its cohesion.

²² Maynooth 4.23.

V. FORMATION

“The Congregation also offers formation to its associates.” (SRL 135.1)

5.1 The programme of formation, conceived or adopted by circumscriptions is more or less structured, depending on those for whom it is intended. It aims, in its principles and whatever be the level of commitment, to offer elements of missionary spirituality and to help to promote awareness and participation to the universal mission in the local churches.

5.2 For Spiritan Friends, it is an ongoing formation, adapted to the needs, expectations and dispositions of these people and to the particular context.

5.3 For Fraternities, it will especially stress the living Spiritan tradition, in its historical and spiritual dimensions.

5.4 Guidance is provided by the professed and by lay people. The laity themselves take part in the planning and provision of the formation programme.

5.5 For Lay Spiritans, the structure is more elaborate.²³

5.5.1 An initial programme, in sessions, is generally offered over 2 years. It is approved by the circumscription.

5.5.2 It aims to develop an awareness of what it means and what it requires to be a Spiritan lay missionary in today’s world.

²³ When available, examples of formation programme implemented in various circumscriptions will be found at the Congregation’s website (www.spiritanroma.org).

5.5.3 It can comprise: an experience of individual and community prayer; a sense of Spiritan community; elements of Christian theology and missionary approaches; a deepened introduction to the spirituality, charism and history of the Congregation; the study of the writings and life of our founders; conditions for a durable solidarity with the poor and marginalised; a critical analysis of structures, values and mechanisms of societies; the dialogue between cultures and religions; the safeguarding of creation; best practice for the protection of minors and vulnerable people.

5.5.4 Beyond the initial formation programme, it is critical to put in place a programme of ongoing formation and renewal, using especially Congregation publications (reviews, books, chapter documents, multimedia products). They will touch upon in a special way new topics and current Spiritan experience.

VI. SOME ORGANISATIONAL ELEMENTS

“New circumscriptions will be attentive to the importance of lay associates and will support their development” (Torre d’Aguilha 4.12).

6.1 The internal organisation of various groups of laity depends on circumscriptions or Unions.²⁴ It will be the result of a dialogue between the laity and the professed.

6.2 It is the responsibility of those in charge of circumscriptions and Unions to offer possibilities for association with the Spiritan family and to make these known; to identify professed accompaniers and reference communities; to plan a programme of formation; to provide information to all members (professed and lay); to promote involvement in circumscription life; to make publications and resources available; to take part regularly in meetings with the lay people.

6.3 It is also down to those in charge to provide information to the General Council about the setting up of groups, their statutes, statistics, annual directory, a copy of each Agreement, and all other useful documents.

6.4 In its internal organisation and particularly in what concerns leadership, it should be remembered that there is a greater need for guides or animators than structures of authority to stimulate creativity, to maintain unity and ensure solidarity among the members.

²⁴ “A Guide (...) to be implemented or confirmed at the level of each circumscription and/or Union of Circumscriptions” (Bagamoyo 2.14).

6.5 Juridically, only those who have made profession can be “members of the Congregation” (SRL 129). But to belong to the ‘Spiritans family’ always requires loyalty, solidarity and responsibility towards all members of this family and towards the Congregation in general.

6.6 The laity take part in the life of the circumscription; they can be invited to meetings, retreats and assemblies. They can also take part in chapters as observers. Here, they take part in the discussions but without the right to vote, neither in elections, nor in chapter decisions.

6.7 The circumscription ensures that the laity can take part effectively or be represented at meetings of their respective categories which may be organised at Union level, or possibly at Congregation level.

6.8 The laity are integrated in the missionary strategy of the circumscription by their involvement in apostolic commitments, in reflection groups, and in commissions. In some circumscriptions, missionary projects depend completely on collaboration with the laity. In this case, extra care will be taken to ensure that they are integrated into the process of discernment and decision-making.

6.9 Regarding Lay Spiritans particularly:

6.9.1 If the group of Lay Spiritans is either large, or where they play a significant role in the circumscription mission, a delegate represents them in council when the agenda concerns that particularly.

6.9.2 Acceptance of a Lay Spiritan has no financial implications for either party.²⁵ Besides, it is recommended that we verify and specify that such a form of association has no legal standing in the country. If a Lay Spiritan is employed by a Congregation group in any capacity, the social and legal laws of the country must be respected, without any ambiguity and in full justice.

6.9.3 In the case of a “mixed” Community, where professed and Lay Spiritans live together, in the service of the same mission, the details of this coexistence should be the object of a detailed contractual agreement, involving the different aspects of the common life: responsibilities, prayer, work, rest, leisure, finance, social security etc.

²⁵ Except the case where the Lay Spiritan is appointed by contract to a particular mission and for a period of time, outside his place of origin (Cf. 6.9.3).

VII. CONCLUSION

At the Maynooth General Chapter, in 1998, in a presentation on Lay Spiritan Associates in the Congregation, it was stated that : *“Our associate brothers and sisters are companions along the way and we believe that we can find a mutual enrichment in each step that we take together. (...) To travel along together with the associates is perhaps the strongest sign of this present time.”*²⁶

Nearly twenty years later, this *Guide*, which draws upon multiple experiences in this area, is not meant to be an end, but rather a significant step on the "covenantal journey." It will be, hopefully, both a reference and a source of inspiration where the diversity of the Spiritan family seeks to be expressed. It does not pretend to reflect any local particularity but, instead, wants to encourage and guide the development of contextualized documents which meet the aspirations, experience and culture in the various circumscriptions and Unions.²⁷ In other words, this *Guide* is still a work in progress: *“We are not at the end of the journey of reflection regarding our identity and our place in the heart of the Congregation. We believe that we need to be open to the manifestation of the Spirit and the specifics of each group.”*²⁸

²⁶ Maynooth, 1.18

²⁷ Cf. Bagamoyo 2.14

²⁸ Torre d’Aguilha, 11.3

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