

PASSION & POSSIBILITY

CONGREGATION CHAPTER 2008

①

- It's good to be here in NA, but even better to be among you Bros and ER people. Thanks to organising committee for invitation to share some thoughts around the Key Directions Cong Chap calling us to
- About 5 yrs ago I visited several areas of the NA Province - Florida, Chicago, Vancouver and New York area as a member of Cong Renewal Team. I have happy memories of the welcomes in communities and ministries across the continent. Since then I've had privilege of visiting communities, ministries and ER groups across the whole Cong - it has been inspiring and leaves me both HOPEFUL as well as DEEPLY CHALLENGED. I'm convinced that all of us have a precious gift - a vocation - to be Disciples of Jesus in an ER way - a way that is evolving and growing all the time as you ~~will hear~~ ...

□ ~~COMPUTER ON BUS~~ *Madness*

~~know~~ -

②

□ DIFFERENT FAITHS

Before the Chap all delegates had meetings with other faith groups. The one that had most impact on me was the Mumbai groups meeting with Muslims:

1. banners in street saying 'Welcome to the Christian Brothers International Delegates; the police and media presence; the warm hand-shakes from dozens of Muslim businessmen as we entered the mosque area; the meal and animated conversations
2. they WANTED to connect with us and honour us- and went to great lengths and expense to do so
3. we heard of the Charitable Foundation these Muslim men belonged to which formed teams with Xtians and Hindus to improve the lives of people in the surrounding slums
4. the most moving moment for me was when we all stood inside the shrine of a Muslim martyr and prayed together. There was a genuine sense of drawing close to each other. Somehow my life as a BROTHER meant something very wide-reaching at that moment - I saw and see *NEW POSSIBILITIES* ~~within~~ *in that kind of encounter*

③

first week of □ ONE BODY NEEDS ALL THE PARTS
during the Chap. because I listened a lot to Chapter Reports from each Province...

- Indians as hosts encompassed their report in dance and in the 4 Elements - earth, air, fire and water which became important symbols during the Chapter
- My own European Prov mimed a group of people tentatively leaving a safe home on an unknown journey; later some of them returned back home for safety whilst others ventured on into the unknown
- Those from Oceania mimed a rowing team heading off with great enthusiasm for new missions in uncharted seas somewhere in the Pacific
- Your NA Prov *feared well* was very focussed on 7 Insights from 2002 Chap - I was struck by the dedication to ~~and~~ organisation for each Insight particularly for "seeking New Members"

7) During those first weeks of Chap we were blessed with the presence of men + women from the OR Network from each continent. I vividly remember their presentation to the Brothers - they stood in a circle and threw balls of coloured wool to each other - and then to the Bros around them ~~until~~ the room was a mass of wool criss-crossing in all directions. Then they said "This ERN is the sum of the RELATIONSHIPS between us all - so Bros - think of a future with us rather than one without us?"



*We invoke the blessing of the Black Bear
The blessing of its strength and solitude,
As it walks the woods and meadows,
And sleeps in its own shadow.
May you walk with bear's power and conviction,
And always remind us to keep searching for our common future.*]

As the Chap moved on and these different cultures and perspectives mixed together through the many conversations we had, I came to realise again how EACH IS NEEDED if the whole is to flourish. [The reading from Romans at Jim Shemanski's rite of entrance to novitiate last week put it this way: "A Body is made up of many parts and each of them has its own use. That's how it is with us. There are many of us, but we each are a part of the Body of Christ"

The Roman's quotation here says it well.

We are blessed to be an international outfit which gives us great possibilities ~~not open to those confined to one continent~~. We owe this reality to Edmund himself who sent his Bros across the world so early in our history and then, later, to the leadership of men like Austin Loftus who challenged every province in 1960s to found new missions beyond their borders.

your compassion for those at the margins of society

I know ^{you} we are still adjusting to becoming a new PROVINCE but I'd urge you to see 'the Body' as the whole Cong and for the NA Prov more than ever, to offer ^{your} ~~in~~ your organising ability, strength, power and conviction as gifts for the whole Cong. ^{so} will open up ~~new~~ NEW POSSIBILITIES hitherto unthought of.

DERN

5) MOVING BEYOND OUR BOUNDARIES

On Friday of 2nd week of Chap our 2 writers, who had been charged with the awesome task of putting into words what was happening among us, came into the Chap room and read out a draft reflection to a hushed Chap. It was called "Revelation: the Spirit of the Risen Jesus speaks" and left us moved if bemused. It spoke of risk, letting go and trust - scary stuff - but we warmed to it and knew we had to go there. Someone commented that there was not much use of our familiar religious vocabulary ... Eucharist, Word of God, Vows etc

Then ^{to somewhere NEW.} a Brother spoke up with emotion in his voice saying something on lines of "Now I'm beginning to see ... these new expressions, this new language is calling us to go BEYOND our current CB boundaries". He sat down and then, one after another, Bros stood up and shared their own struggle and energy in living as a Brother sensing the call to go beyond. And then it was time for lunch ... In the following days we often referred back to that Friday morning ... did it really happen or were we all dreaming? Could we reach that place again ... for some days, even weeks we didn't.

On final morning, we had finished the business early. Facilitator said 'do you want an early coffee break or what do you want to do?' One Brother said "I fully support the document ... I trust the Brothers ... but I have to say that I'm uneasy in my guts ... there is too much 'eco-stuff' in the document and many Bros won't relate to it" Another Bro said he too was uneasy. Then Bro after Bro went to the microphone and said how the whole Chap experience had touched and inspired him and how we had come to the right place in our document. An hour passed and the Chap was over - but we had tasted again the free-flowing dialogue from the heart of that Friday morning 2 weeks earlier. It had not been a dream. It was a real experience of the Chap group; an experience which each of us shared ~~and~~ and remains deep within us. I believe the Spirit was moving in our midst.

As I look back on it now, it was precisely the HONESTY of those 2 Bros who shared which allowed the whole group to move to a new level of heart dialogue which in turn opened us to trust the Spirit present in our midst leading us forward to new territory. The facilitator called this a " PARADIGM SHIFT". In religious language it was a PENTECOST MOMENT - you will have noticed how many times 'the Spirit' comes into the Chap document.

I invite you during these days of Chap & afterwards in community, to reflect on the passage quoted in the CLT Report to Chap which is on your page ...

"When we finally face..." to look at How we communicate with each other - it is the CHALLENGE for the Spirit ...

Handwritten notes:
 - I believe Spirit gives us 'Passion' - Ministry of Spirit
 - so challenge of Long Chap + TMS Chap
 - is to get in touch with yours!
 - think differently beyond our
 - comfort zones? How are you ready are you
 - a commitment from outside
 - and open to think differently? about the issues
 - that will surface
 - **Point**

□ COMMUNITY

There was a deep cry throughout the Chapter for us to address the issue of Community Life. It was expressed variously but the Vision Statement came out in the end saying: we are called to:
"build healthy, compassionate communities living a heart-centred spirituality and supporting one another in mission"

At a time when many Religious in the western world are choosing to live singly, this statement is prophetic and I believe significant for the Cong. It's my experience that despite our Constitutions and many Chap docs naming Community Living as central to our lives, we find it extremely hard to do, particularly in the area of honest communication among us. In my home European Prov, the New Life in Mission project of setting up new communities which explore new ministries, is a serious attempt to respond to this area of difficulty in our life as Bros. 3 communities are up and running, 18 more Bros are beginning the program now.

- when I see deprived people/youth
living better/growing/ eg. Gr in N
ER Camps

4

□ **MISSION AT MARGINS** → our passion is for ministry

From the Prov presentations it was clear that all new mission openings throughout the Cong in past 6 years are "at the margins" - as the 2002 Chap directed us to do. I have been thrilled to hear of your own new missions at the margins ... in Brownsville, New Orleans but also your determination to sustain long-established inner city communities which serve some of most deprived youth in your country. You can see how frequently "ministry at the margins" is referred to in the Chap document. So this remains a key focus for our CB mission for next 6 years. I'd like to draw attention to 2 new aspects of this overall call which surfaced at the Chap:

- 1) the role of **ADVOCACY** - speaking out for Justice (Kevin Cawley will speak to this)
- 2) the **HIV / AIDS** pandemic sweeping parts of the poorer parts of our world. At the Chap we discovered that most of us coming from western countries knew so little about this disease and its social, moral and spiritual dimensions that we needed to go back to school to learn about it. The African Prov has opened a new international community at Orange Farm near Jo'burg to respond to this crisis facing so many. The Chap calls ALL of us to inform ourselves at this time ...

- Bill Stevens
- Gabe MCH

□ **CONFIDENCE IN THE FUTURE**

Finally, I'd like to share some wisdom from a 90 something-year-old Passionist priest currently living in Carolina - Thomas Berry. See your page - **Read out. This man has
End with a **COMMUNAL ACT OF FAITH** in the dynamism of the Universe we call 'passion'
God ... **3 groups read section - then all last section

[Handwritten signature]