

Province Chapter 2008, Cornwall, Ont., Canada

Wednesday, July 9, 9:00 a.m.

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, Brothers.

This feels like Dejavu...all over again! I believe it was around this time last year that I was up here saying a few words of welcome...and then...boom... the lights went out! (Truth is, I've been in the dark ever since!)

If it feels like dejavu for you...that may be a good sign. Maybe it means we are getting to know each other a little more and really getting into our journey of sharing common experiences and searching for God's will in our lived reality.

Unlike this time last year we are now gathered as Chapter...a holy and sacred time of shared prayer and daring; daring to be disciples of Jesus and followers of Edmund.

This morning we turn our attention yet again to our apostolate. I begin with the assumption that we are very aware of the "numbers" as they apply to our brotherhood in this Province. ( 79% of us are between 60 and 99 years of age. 15% in our 50's, 5% in our 40's ...and less than 1% under 40 years of age! What does that look like? Could I ask all to stand? Those who are 70 +...please be seated. Look around. Those who are in their 60's please be seated. Look around. Those who are in their 50's please be seated. Look around!) In fact we are older and fewer, there are increasing costs and diminishing resources. (The financial picture will be presented to you this afternoon.) We still struggle to respond to our human fragilities and to an ever changing world. And yet, as we journeyed from all over this continent and beyond to be here we do so in the belief that our God is calling us to respond to these new realities.

Among our Edmund Rice Christian Brothers in North America are men who seek to know God and to serve God's people. For some that "seeking" is a mere flicker of a flame; for others it is a warm and inviting fire in their lives. Together we offer a variety

of gifts.....as teachers, administrators, Guidance councilors, campus ministers, college and University professors, authors, youth ministers, outreach volunteers, ministry to African-Americans, Latinos and migrant workers. We have Parish Administrators, Councilors to abused women, councilors to Drug Addicts and Alcoholics, Hospital Chaplains, Prison Ministers, Alternate Education Ministry. There are North American Brothers ministering in the Pan African Province, in the Latin America Region...and in the European Province. There are Brothers ministering to people with HIV and AIDS. In our school ministry we are committed to helping establish an inclusive school in one of the poorest parts of this continent....in south Texas. We have established a community of Brothers in the still ravaged city of New Orleans. We have Brothers ministering to our sick and infirm Brothers. We have Brothers engaged in fundraising and Development. There is the ministry of presence...those Brothers who pray each day that the work of the Brothers will bear fruit in the lives of those we serve. And Brothers, all of these ministries are valid and we belong there!

For a long time now, Brothers, have been serving the poor and marginalized. By God's grace and our own good efforts our Brothers are doing amazing good work in a wide variety of ministry. Let us acknowledge that truth and give praise and thanks to God for the good that has been and is being accomplished.

And yet....we are faced with the challenging questions emerging from a deep desire for New Life....a desire for new ways of being in community and from that community experience of responding to the needs of poor and marginalized people in our midst. In a limited sense our "Action Plan" has already been speaking for itself in the creative and consistent ministries of our Brothers.

And yet....and yet we are jolted back to the reality of our diminishing numbers. We work so hard that we sometimes have a sense of "unreality"....as if we are 15 years younger than what we are....as if we have legions of Brothers lined up for our annual "change list"!

I want now to review with you our journey thus far in our efforts to arrive at an Apostolic Action Plan which was mandated by Cornwall II ...”**for the purpose of optimizing human and financial resources to better serve the poor and marginalized.**” Before doing so I want to inform you that the PLT **does not have** an Apostolic Action Plan to present to you during this Chapter. We have taken the advice of the Writing Committee and believe that developing such a plan is a slow and on-going process. It impacts the lives of our Brothers so deeply. As you will see in the following review of efforts to date, the work has been done mostly in isolation...individuals completing surveys and sharing those findings with you.

Let me state up front the hoped for outcomes from this Chapter regarding the topic of an Apostolic Action Plan. (1.) We will have done some more visioning about our future ministry....a sharing of vision. (2.) We will have engaged in heart-centered dialogue about where Brothers will minister. (3.) We will have identified criteria for PLT to use in making decisions affecting where we minister. Men, the PLT is asking for your help to make informed decisions...informed by the longings of your hearts. Let us continue the process and not be afraid of the questions it may raise for us as a community of vowed religious. We and our apostolate are well worth the time and effort.

By way of review:

Last July in this room an Apostolic Audit was presented consisting of two parts: (a) the results of the CARA Study and (b) a General Data Statistical Report from 30 schools which are in relationship with the Congregation. Sister Mary Bendyna from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate presented the findings of two province wide surveys....one from the Brothers and the other from our Partners in Ministries. The response rates were outstanding: 84% and 78% respectively.

Among the key findings of the CARA Report:

- Clear evidence that decisions need to be made about ministry

- Brothers gave “strengthening community life and spirituality” the highest priority (the desire for something more)
- Education is still the most important ministry for most Brothers
- The two highest criteria for any school: serve the poor and further the charism
- The Brothers want the Province to do many things but there are not enough Brothers willing and able to do them
- Responding to diminishment takes a great deal of psychological and emotional energy
- Brothers think of their own ministry of being a “Brother” as more important than the collective ministries of the Province.

Also last July, flowing from the Apostolic Audit, the Brothers voted to establish an Apostolic Action Plan Writing Committee. The Writing Committee (Brothers John Casey, Joe DeMaria, Sean Moffett, Mike Segvich and Ray Vercruyssee and myself as PLT liaison) met a number of times and submitted its report on February 7<sup>th</sup> of this year. The report, entitled “**Dare to Be Disciples: A Future Not Our Own**”, was made available to each man in the Province. This report was a valuable step toward arriving at an action plan. It chronicled the movement of the Spirit in the Congregation from the 1996 General Chapter up to the establishment of the Writing Committee. The report presented a statistical forecast of our demographics. It offered an explanation of Apostolic Mobility. It proposed Principals for establishing new foundations, for continued engagement and for moving on. It pointed out the Congregations use of a cyclic process of discernment. Perhaps most importantly, the report proposed a method of continued collaboration rather than a plan for new ministries, continuations or disengagements. Finally, the report offered four steps in a five year strategic plan: 1. continued commitment to the poor and marginalized, 2. develop succession plans and sponsorship options, 3. ongoing formation of Brothers and colleagues, 4. scenarios and biographies to help us envision our own biography six years hence.

Before I go any further, I want to ask the members of the Writing Committee to stand so we can acknowledge their outstanding work. (Applause)

Some Brothers (and I count myself among them) had hoped that the report would name names regarding continuations and disengagements of ministry sites. I believe there is a collective desire for the “new” that requires “action” or that desire may die. Throughout our history we were great at opening new places but we are poor at withdrawing from places that no longer need us. As Philip Pinto reminded us in this room a year ago, “Charism should be lived with our hearts...not tied to what we do.” However, I accept the stated conviction of the Writing Committee that “naming names” could not be done without further consultation with the Brothers. For me it took a while, but I am at peace with that...I respect it...it represents the wisdom of the Writing Committee.

Taking a cue from the position of the Writing Committee, the PLT wanted one more consultation with individual Brothers. In a one page letter sent to each Brother the PLT asked each man to reflectively read the Report from the Writing Committee. Each man was asked to tell us on a scale of one (not at all) to five (very) how open he is to helping form a new community for a new Province ministry. Also, each man was invited to prioritize our current ministries in terms of Province effort to provide Brothers. Finally, each man was invited to suggest one new ministry initiative for Province consideration to provide Brothers. ( I will give you a handout with the results....minus names of Brothers.)

The number of Brothers who replied: 171 (approx. 66%)

Open to transfer to a new community for a new venture:

- 1 (48 Brothers)
  - 2 (30 Brothers)
  - 3 (30 Brothers)
  - 4 (13 Brothers)
  - 5 (31 Brothers)
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- 19 Brother did not reply to this question

Current ministry priority to provide Brothers: (numerical top ten named)

- All Hallows
- Rice High School (Harlem)
- Guadalupe Regional Middle School (Brownsville, Texas)
- New Orleans
- Schools/Province Owned
- Archbishop Curley/Notre Dame HS (Miami) + Damien Memorial (Honolulu)
- Los Hermanos (Bonita Springs, FL) + St Mary's Academy (Dominica, W. I.)
- Iona College + Martin de Porres (Dominica) + St. Joseph's School, (Mississi)
- Murphy Center (St. John's, Newfoundland)
- Br. Rice (Chicago) + O'Dea (Seattle) + St. Thomas More (Burnaby, B.C.)

The 171 Brothers submitted 71 new ministry initiatives that they feel should be considered by the Province to provide Brothers for ministry.

While in no way binding, this information is helpful because it does “name names” of Brothers who are open to new community for new ministry. It is also helpful to have some indication of the priority Brothers give to our current ministries given our limitations and commitment to the poor.

I also want to point out that the Cornwall mandate requires us to optimize financial resources. To that end, we will have to take a serious look at Brothers' salaries, the sources of those salaries and the extent to which the Province is supported by those salaries. Currently, the three different financial systems in our one Province make it difficult to ascertain the full picture of salaries, but exactly “how” a ministry site supports the province must be and will be an important factor in the equation leading to the drafting of a plan.

Well, there it is, Brothers.

As a community of religious, let us turn attention this morning to a process to help us achieve our hoped for outcomes of visioning, heart-centered dialogue re where Brothers will minister and identification of criteria for use by the PLT. And to lead us in the process I now turn things over to our facilitator, Paul Michalenko.

Thank you.

Paul.....