

Principles for Establishing New Foundations

It is our recommendation that, in discerning possibilities for new foundations, the Brothers adopt the following four guiding principles:

1. The call emerges from the needs of the People of God.
2. The ministries primarily concern the evangelization of youth, especially the materially poor.
3. We have a community of brothers able to accept the mission.
4. The mission will be collaborative and its continuity grounded in the local church through the empowerment of the laity.

Needs of the People of God: Any new foundation is a response to the needs of the People of God. The call is often first heard by an individual brother. The source of that call may be those in need of ministry, “the cry of the poor”, or perhaps individuals or authorities whose positions make them particularly aware of a pressing need. Occasionally the call comes through research.

Evangelization of youth especially the materially poor:

“We Christian Brothers are called by God as religious in consecrated brotherhood for the evangelization of youth within the mission of the Church” (Constitution 1).

“As apostolic religious we are missioned by the Church for the evangelization of youth, and especially for the education and care of the materially poor” (Constitution 24).

Schools have been a primary tool in the response of the brothers to the needs of youth. Many of the brothers have particular expertise that is greatly needed in the development of new schools, in the renewal of schools that have drifted from their mission of evangelization and in the formation of teachers and administrators. Other Brothers have demonstrated the potential for adult education, community formation, social action and eco-justice as well as ministry through personal service, presence or accompaniment for those in need – all means of building up the community to nurture the faith of youth

Community in mission:

“Attentive to the word and open to the power of the Spirit, we are called as brothers to form gospel communities which are our principal means of evangelization” (Constitution 25).

We understand our ministry to be one of building communities in which our coworkers and the youth we serve experience Jesus Christ manifest in the love of God and love of neighbor. Our capacity for community building is nourished by our sense of belonging within our brotherhood on a global and a local level.

In establishing missions we seek to assure that each brother will have the support of a local community of brothers. To the extent possible we seek to establish communities of at least three

brothers who share a common residence and are blessed with the possibility of being physically together for mutual support, affirmation, discernment, prayer, Eucharist, meals and recreation

Empowering others: Opportunities for collaboration with the local church and the formation of others in mission will inform our discernment as we seek to assure a continuity that reaches beyond the service to which we can realistically commit. We welcome and encourage lay members of the church to assume an ever more significant leadership role in the administration of the mission and of planning for a future that might not involve the direct participation of any member of the Congregation of Christian Brothers.

Principles for Continuing Engagement

The same four principles for evaluating the appropriateness of a new mission can also serve as the guiding principles in deciding to continue our engagement in an existing ministry. Brothers individually and collectively are encouraged to review and plan with respect to his and their continuing engagement. They would ask themselves: What will be the age and health of the members of the present community? What are the conditions that suggest continuity? Whom are we serving? How?—What are the parameters of sustained engagement? What needs to be in place to carry forward the mission and the various ministries of the local Brothers' community? What are the opportunities for formation, for attracting both new vowed members and collaborators? What are my/our plans for this year, for next year and for the foreseeable future? Assuming non-replacement of current brothers in the mission, what preparations need to be made?

Principles for Moving On

It is inevitable that the time will come when the Brothers will no longer be available to staff many of the ministries where they now find themselves. Aging, newly identified needs, the gifts and talents of particular men, and other factors will confront individuals, the communities and leadership. Again, the same four principles for evaluating the appropriateness of a new mission can serve as the guiding principles for eventual disengagement.

A systemic perspective on any proposed withdrawal may reveal a complicated network of personal and interpersonal relationships with respect to the "ownership" of the mission. The more that stakeholders are participants in the process of decision making the more opportunity they have to work through their own need for closure. At the same time pre-mature revelations of a possible withdrawal of Brothers can precipitate an unnecessarily painful conclusion.

This is not the first time in the history of the Brothers in North America that we have had to radically change our relationship with some ministries. Our past experience will help us to plan for changes in the future. While some of our withdrawals have been traumatic for various stakeholders, most have simply been a gradual recognition of conditions that emerged over time. Long term planning probably would not have altered the conclusion, but it might have rendered the whole process more helpful and healthful for both the individuals and the mission.

True collaboration serves as a route to more effective initiations, joyful service and smoother transitions.