



PASSIONIST COMMUNITY LIFE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Introduction:

The purpose of this brief paper prepared by the Working Group on Community is to serve the Chapter by tracking the changes that have taken place in the experience and form of our Passionist community life over the past few decades, the causes and inspirations for these changes, and the background for these changes in our official documentation and church teaching since Vatican II. Our goal is to inform the Chapter and to prompt creative thinking about the future development of our community life, and to offer some recommendations towards this end.

Definition of “Community”:

In speaking of “community,” or the related term “collaboration,” in the context of the Passionists, some precision is helpful. “Collaboration” between vowed religious and lay persons can take place on various levels such as the level of ordinary service: maintenance, security, food service, accounting, etc. It is presumed that such relationships would be cordial and caring and over time might build into genuine friendships. Some of these functions might be assumed by volunteers but in many instances involve paid employment. The employee-level relationship should be cordial, fair, equitable, and mutually accountable according to best practices. However, such “collaboration” may not necessarily involve or require a deeper immersion in a Passionist community experience or some level of permanence. Not all lay collaborators, employees, or friends of the Passionists desire to be immersed in Passionist community life in the deeper sense of the term. Experience suggests it is prudent not to apply “familial” terms too loosely to what is an employer/employee relationship (family members are not ordinarily hired, evaluated, or let go...).

On the other hand, “Passionist community” can be understood either in a traditional sense (i.e., traditional vowed religious living in a local community), or in a broader sense in which interested lay women and men enter into an intentional and mutual communal relationship of varying degree of intensity and permanence with vowed Passionists. This may involve a shared spirituality centered around the Passionist charism or a shared form of ministry. This latter level of community involving both vowed and lay is sometimes referred to as the “Passionist family.” In most instances, the notion of “Passionist community” referred to in this document refers to this latter understanding of “community.”

I. The Evolution of traditional Passionist Community Life in Holy Cross Province:

- a) Over the past several decades Passionist community life and ministry have evolved from a “monastic” form of religious life (e.g., cloister; set hours of liturgy and prayer, common horarium, etc.) to a more flexible and informal expression of community life and mission conceived of as primarily apostolic or as a form of evangelical witness.
- b) Vatican II brought a new emphasis to the role of the laity in the life and mission of the church. Through baptism, all the members of the church share a fundamental equality and dignity (e.g., the definition of church as the “people of God” affirmed in *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*) and thus there has developed a new awareness of the meaning of the church as a Christian community, rooted in the essential equality and solidarity of all

followers of Jesus based on their baptism, prior to any differentiation into hierarchical roles. The statements of recent popes and particularly Pope Francis stress the essential role of the laity in the mission of the church and the need to avoid “clericalism,” that is, an elitist view which sees the ordained and religious as inherently superior to the lay members of the church.

- c) Parallel to this and also prompted by the Vatican Council has been an ongoing clarification and appreciation of our Passionist charism and its impact on the development of community life, especially as it relates to our relationship with the laity. From the beginning of St. Paul of the Cross’s founding of the Congregation, laity featured prominently in Paul’s sense of mission for his group, since preaching to the people, especially the poor and forgotten, was his predilection. Also, his expertise in spiritual direction was largely available to a number of lay persons, remarkable in their own right for holiness of life (Agnes Grazi, Lucy Burlini, Rosa Calabressi, Thomas Fossi). Lay organizations like the Confraternity of the Sacred Passion instituted by St. Paul, the Calvarian Society and the Community of Christ Crucified, Stauros USA and the Passionist Lay Missioners are just a few examples. Over the past several years there has been an increasing presence and involvement of laity in our local communities as well as in Passionist provincial assemblies and chapters. The evolving partnering with the laity in Passionist life is also reflected in our General Chapter and Holy Cross Province documentation. (? include Community of Passionist Partners?)
- d) At the same time, on a practical level increasing numbers of lay men and women have become directly involved in the everyday functioning of our local communities and provincial administration, in many instances fulfilling roles that earlier were done by vowed religious, particularly Passionist brothers.
- e) Across Holy Cross Province lay men and women are involved in a variety of ways in our local Passionist communities:
 - a. Since 1995, thanks to the earlier work of the Lay Collaboration Committee (which became the Membership Committee just prior to the Chapter) that chapter produced a lengthy statement of “Lay Partnership” (n.41 in our Provincial Chapter Enactments). This has led to some of our locations forming “Community of Passionist Partners” (CPP) who share at the level of charism. CPP is open to both lay and vowed with regular meetings for study, prayer and commitment to Church service.
 - b. In our four retreat centers, lay men and women serve in administrative and ministerial roles, both on employed and volunteer bases, and, through the development of retreat center governing boards, are involved in their governance.
 - c. In Louisville, laity are also involved in a variety of employed and volunteer capacities in the health care of senior Passionists and in the overall life and mission of the Passionists there, including deep involvement in the Earth and Spirit Center.
 - d. As is typical of most parishes in the United States, laity have key roles in the life and mission in our parishes in Louisville and Birmingham.
 - e. The provincial office and the province development office are staffed with key laity who have been associated with the Passionists for many years and share in substantial ways in the direction and governance of the province as finance officers, development

officers, investment counselors, and essential administrative staff. Advisory boards, made up primarily of lay resource members, guide provincial policy in Passionist charism formation and financial issues.

- f. In Chicago's St. Vincent Strambi community there has been a strong relationship with Catholic Theological Union, of which Holy Cross Province is one of the founders and sponsoring bodies, involving close collaboration with laity in a multitude of roles: faculty, lay and religious formation, administration, and as fellow students. For many decades now, local lay collaborators have regularly participated in the community's daily liturgy and some community celebrations.
- g. In Nashville, through the Community of Passionist Partners and the leadership of Ken Schmitt, lay Passionists form a community of worship and service on their own, with periodic contact and collaboration with visiting vowed Passionists.
- h. In other words...the involvement of lay men and women in the life and mission of Holy Cross Province is an ongoing reality. The question is not whether there is a Passionist community of vowed and lay members, but rather what will be the proper future development of this community.

II. The Social Context that Impels us to Review Our Community Life:

There may be several impulses that have brought the issue of the relationship of laity and vowed Passionists to the fore now in preparation for the upcoming provincial chapter. Some of these factors were brought up in the survey on community life sponsored by our Working Group recently:

- a) The hunger for an experience of a genuine supportive community in the midst of the individualism and isolation of modern 21st century life is especially felt by some younger people today (although in our survey it did not register as an important factor among those already connected with the Passionists).
- b) The demographics of vowed Passionist membership in Holy Cross Province and its impact on forming sustainable communities. The declining number of vowed Passionists naturally turns attention to the future of the community and the search for other means of sustaining the mission entrusted to us.
- c) The need for both vowed and lay members of the emerging Passionist community for ongoing formation that involves awareness of our charism, our history, and the social and cultural context of today's church. It is important that the emerging design of such a program be in tune with the discussions about collaboration and community that are part of the chapter preparation.

III. Key Factors Prompting Passionist Community Life today.

Based on the results of our survey and discussions within our own Working Group and with other related Working Groups (e.g., Collaboration), we have identified the following as the most important reasons for why some are seeking a deeper involvement in Passionist community life:

- a) Relationship to our Passionist charism and spirituality: i.e., the Passion of Jesus as sign of God’s love for the world; the need for compassion; solidarity with the crucified of today; and a contemplative heritage are profound aspects of our Christian faith that attract laity to the Passionist way of life. In some instances, this also involves a desire to share in the apostolic ministry associated with the Passionists, i.e., proclaiming the memory of the Passion.
- b) Lay and vowed Passionists prize the mutual friendships and support that have grown over the years and thus enjoy being with each other. This also includes many “alums” who formerly belonged to the Passionists and still have warm memories and loyalty to the Passionists. This connection of friendship was cited by virtually all the respondents.
- c) A related response that drew a lot of support was the desire of both laity and religious to live an intense and authentic form of Christian life with the support of good, like-minded people.
- d) Notably absent in the responses to this survey was any expressed desire to build some kinds of fixed structures for the incorporation of laity into Passionist life, at least in this stage of our development. (Though it should be noted that some have otherwise voiced concern for “a place at the table.”) Preference seems to be for more intense involvement in the spiritual and social life of existing Passionist communities and more intentional involvement in Passionist ministries, with the development of more formal structures of consultation and governance emerging over time from this deepening relationship.

IV. The Exhortation of the October 2018 Passionist General Chapter:

In our deliberations we have noted the important exhortation about renewal of our community life in “A Call to Action” document sent from the 47th Passionist General Chapter of October 2018. Whatever forms our Passionist community life will take in the future, it must be a profoundly Christian community, reflective of the values of the gospel and in harmony with our Passionist charism and mission. While the focus of the General Chapter recommendations is understandably on the community of vowed Passionists, its recommendations are in harmony with the wider notion of community being discussed in Holy Cross Province and can easily be adapted. We cite the pertinent section of the “A Call to Action” document:

“The General Chapter gave close attention to renewing Passionist Community Life. Our Constitutions present us with the historical and existential reason for our foundation in the Church:

Saint Paul of the Cross gathered companions to live together and to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to all. (Constitutions, #1)

The Church with her supreme authority approved our Congregation and its Rule and entrusted us with a Mission: to preach the Gospel of the Passion by our life and apostolate. (Constitutions, #2)

We are called to a life in Community, but always in the Missionary dimension. As the Superior General stated in his Report to the Chapter: ‘Our Mission is integrally connected with our life in Community ... as two sides of the same coin. Our life is our Mission (by witness), our Mission is our life (by action).’ The Community Life desired by Saint Paul of the Cross - and also by ourselves - cannot be closed in on itself or be self-referential, but must participate in the Mission of the universal Church according to the Charism we have received. Community Life, therefore, is a primary dimension of our apostolate.

We propose as elements for our OBJECTIVES in Community Life:

- 1. *Shaping our Community Life as a ‘Covenant’ which expresses the true heart of our lives together:***
 - a) We recognize our life together as the catalyst of our renewal and where we are accountable.*
 - b) We acknowledge that the animation of Community Life depends on all members, not just one person.*
 - c) We work to create a welcoming environment.*

- 2. *Making our Community Life a ‘school of prayer’:***
 - a) Ensuring our relationship with God is the center of everything we do.*
 - b) Through commitment to the experience of prayer, contemplation, silence.*

- 3. *Making our Community Life a ‘school of humanity’:***
 - a) We promote a spirit of dialogue and tolerance, sacrifice and patience – creating something that is humanly livable.*
 - b) We practice understanding, forgiveness and reconciliation - integrating all aspects of our life in common.*

We propose as elements for our planned ACTION in Community Life:

- 1. *In daily life by:***
 - i) Communities establishing the times of praying together.*
 - ii) Communities establishing the times of meeting together.*
 - iii) Openly addressing the many problems and challenges that face us in the practice of Community: individualism, limited and closed mentality, inability to live Community life, the difficulty of relationships with the confreres, disagreement with the authorities and the negative impact of living too much in the digital world.*

- 2. *Planning our communal life by:***
 - i) Each Community making an assessment of itself every year, and planning the development of the Community project on an annual basis.*
 - ii) Each community regularly reviewing the evolution of their life.*
 - iii) Providing training for local superiors.*
 - iv) Major Superiors drawing up a statement (letter) for catechesis on life in Community.”*

Conclusion: Where do we go from here?

1. We strongly recommend that the existing local communities of vowed Passionists take to heart the recommendations of our General Chapter concerning strengthening the quality of our community life cited above, forging a covenant that includes an express assessment of its life of prayer, its regular schedule of meetings, its financial stewardship, and of all the dimensions of its common life.

On a province level we recommend that attention be given to the preparation of local leaders, and that initiatives be undertaken to invite new members to relate to and join our communities, including both vowed and lay membership.

2. Our Working Group also recommends that local communities of vowed religious intensify and extend their interaction with those lay men and women who seek deeper ties to our Passionist spirituality and mission. For example, by invitation to participation in morning and evening prayer and in the Eucharist; by scheduling days of recollection and retreat in common; by opening more opportunities for celebration, shared meals, and other types of social interaction, particularly on Passionist feast days.
3. We recommend the design and implementation of an ongoing and accessible Passionist formation program that would involve at appropriate levels both lay and vowed members and involve study of the history and spirituality of the Passionists. For lay members who would be designated for more formal ministerial and leadership roles, the province should support additional theological and pastoral training at a professional level.
4. As a Working Group, we do not think it is timely to propose new juridical structures to further develop the existing relationships between vowed and lay members that now constitute the wider Passionist Community. Yet leaders of local Passionist communities can make greater efforts to involve key laity in the life and future of the community through good communication and consultation. At the same time, we recommend that the new provincial administration explore, perhaps through the Office of Mission Effectiveness, the canonical, legal, and financial conditions necessary for more formal involvement of lay members in the planning and leadership of the province.
5. Finally, we recommend that the upcoming Provincial chapter: A) take stock of its progress to date in bringing together vowed and lay members of the Passionist community; B) celebrate this as a work of the Spirit; and C) recommit ourselves to continuing this journey of faith together.

