

COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS

Ongoing Formation



COMBONI COMMUNITY ANIMATION TOOLS

Ongoing Formation Centre

ROME 2012

COMBONI COMMUNITY

ANIMATION TOOLS

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|--|-----------|
| Letter of the General Superior | 05 |
| 1. Community Project | |
| Presentation and guidelines | 07 |
| Scheme of elaboration | 11 |
| 2. Pastoral Plan..... | 17 |
| 3. Weekly Community Day | 20 |
| 4. Community Council | 24 |
| 5. Life Sharing | 33 |
| 6. Community fraternal help | 36 |
| 7. Life Personal Project | 39 |

PCs are to ensure that communities use the tools foreseen by the RL for the animation of communities: council and charter of the community, pastoral plan and monthly retreat. The Commission of OGF and /or the Secretariat of Evangelization will propose concrete plans for the re-working of these charters and pastoral plans. PCs will evaluate their application during visits to the communities.

CA 2009, n° 13.1

PRESENTATION

Dear Confreres,
Provincial and Delegation Superiors
OGF Coordinators
Superiors of Communities,

We are pleased to present to you this book of “tools” to animate our communities, which has been prepared by the Central Commission for Ongoing Formation, in collaboration with the Provincial Coordinators in charge of this sector (2011).

The Chapter has given ample emphasis to the role of ongoing formation, convinced that this is “a determining factor not only for our life and apostolic efficacy but also for the future of the Institute” (CA ’09, 137), and reiterating what the Rule of Life (100.2) states, that is, that the local community is indeed the “favourable environment” to practice it.

Without minimizing the personal responsibility of everyone, it seems that a turning point for the desired renewal of our Institute lies precisely in the revitalization of the local community. A community life of “quality”, which proposes to live – in the logic of the “highest common denominator” – the values of the Rule of Life, is the humus or environmental factor that can nourish our personal commitment and encourage us in times of weakness and fatigue.

This does nothing but confirm the importance of your role as “animators of the community”. The Rule of Life says about the “superior’s ministry”: “The superior animates the community and the individual members in the search for the will of God, in the realization of their missionary consecration and the growth of charity” (RV 107). A very heavy task, indeed. But the Lord who has entrusted us with this ministry will not leave us alone but give us his spirit of charity and service, discernment and fortitude, humility and patience. Let us put our trust in him!

This booklet, presented to all, is specifically designed for you, as a supporting instrument in your effort to programme and animate community life. It offers you seven tools:

- **2 of community planning**, as a help in programming the Community Project and the Pastoral Plan.
- **2 of ordinary animation of the community**, with proposals for the planning of the Weekly Community Day and Community Council.
- **2 of fraternal promotion** to offer special initiatives, such as Life Sharing and the Meeting for Brotherly Help.
- And finally a proposal for the development of the **Life Personal Project**, mentioned in the Chapter (CA '09, 30.1), which is certainly basic to the commitment and vitality of the community.

These proposals will have to be adapted to your concrete situation and will certainly be further enriched by your particular experience. True fidelity requires greater creativity. So from this joint effort in diversity something new may come to further improve these tools.

Dear superiors, we place this book into your hands, with the confidence that you will give to it the same importance that the General Council has given to it, so that it may be a useful and valuable tool of reference for years to come for our communities, and especially for you. We are sure that it will be a valuable contribution to “build enthusiastic communities able to promote the integral growth of their members and be an authentic witness of evangelization”, as the Chapter desires (CA '09, 33).

We entrust this initiative and the effort you will make to put it into practice and to make it fruitful to the intercession of Comboni and our predecessors.

Fraternally Yours,



Fr. Enrique Sánchez González
Superior General

Rome, February 2012
140th anniversary of Comboni Institute Rules (1872)

1. COMMUNITY PROJECT

Presentation and Guidelines

The XVII General Chapter (2009), among the means proposed for community animation, evokes several times the Community Charter and the Community Project (cf. 13.1; 30.2; 31.2; 40; 140.2; 143.1).

The Community Charter, used in the past mainly in formation houses, was proposed to all the communities by the Chapter 1985: “Every local community specifies its purpose, describing its inner life and pastoral planning in the ‘Community Charter’ that revises every year” (AC’85 n° 83). Since then, this invitation was renewed on several occasions, in our Chapters, as one of the most important means to promote the vitality of the Comboni community.

1. What is the Community Charter?

Fr. Manuel Horta offers a very comprehensive definition in an article published in our Bulletin (cf. MCCJ Bulletin, 149, pp. 6-10): “It is basically a project of a concrete community life which specifies identity, aims and objectives of the community, its internal life, its work planned and the means to implement it, monitoring tools etc. ... to promote faithfulness and growth of the community and its members to their vocation, and to make them more apostolically fruitful”.

Often we make a distinction between Community Charter and Community Project. The Charter would have a characteristic of greater stability (and therefore rather aim at the “principles” and basic guidelines that govern the life and the activities of the community), while the Project would be its practical yearly application). For practical reasons and simplicity, we prefer to speak of a single document (Project or Community Charter) where the permanent and the most temporary elements intertwine and illuminate each other.

2. Characteristics of a Community Charter or Project

2.1 Unanimity. All community members are invited to participate actively in the elaboration of its Charter / Project. The community should get as much as possible to a consensus of views, so that they can establish goals and objectives, strategies and means accepted by everybody and be able to mobilize the efforts and energies of all.

2.2 Idealism. The Community Project doesn't reflect simply "what is done in the community", the practices or traditions, a kind of platform of understanding between the members of the community, a kind of "lowest common denominator" of ideals. The Project should present an "ideal" towards which the whole community feels animated, reflects how the Rule of Life is applied to the concrete situation of that community. A flattened Project would be counterproductive and would only serve to justify the mediocrity.

2.3 Realism. But the Community Project must be, at the same time, realistic. The exaggerated idealization can lead the community members to feel unable to take it and even less to live it. The Project is realist when it is within the reach of the members of the community, when it responds to the urgent and real needs of the community, and when the targets are within the limits of human and spiritual resources available.

2.4 Concreteness. In order to become operational, the Project should present objectives, goals and means well defined, providing time, means and concrete measures for its regular review and adaptation to the reality of the community.

2.5 Globality. A community is not an island. Its Project is part of a wider plan of the Church, the Institute and the Province, and must somehow make clear and concrete those goals. However, it shouldn't be a simple reproduction of a greater plan. It requires simultaneously fidelity and creativity, specificity and concreteness, in order to be felt as a community project.

3. Elements to be specified in the Community Project

3.1 Identity of the community. In the Community Project, according to its reality and its specific purpose, each community should draw its “identikit” (ideal image) which remains as a point of reference and inspiration for the entire program. This is what the 2009 Chapter tried to do, for the whole Institute, in its first document, on our Identity (cf. CA n ° 5).

3.2 Objectives and goals. The Project looks for a practical way to embody the ideal proposed by the Rule of Life in the concrete situation in which the Comboni community is called to live its mission. The general principles and objectives are here brought out through specific objectives or goals, to inspire and animate the various communitarian and personal activities.

3.3 Programming. It’s the distribution in time and space of the activities and initiatives to achieve the objectives and goals of the community project. It concerns the internal life of the community and its activities. This programming must be very specific and get to the WHAT? WHO? HOW? WHEN? Specifically, this planning must involve:

- **Community life:** relationships, gatherings, meetings, weekly community day, community council, community services and responsibilities, timetable, holidays, etc.
- **Prayer life:** personal prayer, common prayer (daily, weekly and monthly rhythm), liturgical celebrations, retreats, spiritual exercises, etc.
- **Vows:** practice and witness of the evangelical counsels, the economic dimension...
- **Ongoing Formation:** initiatives at different levels: personal, community and inter-community, provincial, of the Institute and local Church.
- **Activities of the missionary community:** evangelization, formation, vocational and missionary animation, etc. The Community Project just includes the general guidelines that cover these services; the more detailed plans for these areas can be worked out separately and added as attachments.

3.4 Evaluation. Without a review and a periodic evaluation of the Community Project, there is a danger that the good intentions and what was decided and programmed with enthusiasm and good will may be forgotten or remain only on paper. It is important that the Project will specify when and how the community will make the evaluation.

Although the drafting of the Community Charter or Project may seem somewhat a theoretical and complex exercise, in fact, for most of our communities, formed only of two, three or four people, it is quite simple, when we believe in it.

Experience teaches us that a good community programming is a guarantee of a more fraternal and harmonious community life and a more fruitful and effective missionary service.

1. COMMUNITY PROJECT

Scheme of Elaboration

NB: This proposal of the Community Project puts together into one single document the Community Charter and the Annual Project, having as point of reference the Chapter Acts 2009 (CA'09). Obviously, we have to take into consideration the type of Comboni community, the Six Year Plan of the Province as well as the local reality (Church, society and culture). The community will adapt this proposal to its concrete situation, shortening it or enriching it, according to its circumstances.

Introduction

1. PRESENTATION OF THE COMMUNITY: OUR REALITY

(CA'09, 1: "The Institute is taking note of the need and urgency of revisiting or rediscovering the gift of that charisma in order to revitalize it and transmit it to new generations.")

1.1 Description and composition of the community

(Presentation of the Community: some historical references, type of community, the missionary service that is developed, the members who make up the community and their respective services)

1.2 Socio, cultural and ecclesial context

(Short but comprehensive mentioning of the socio, cultural and ecclesial context in which the community lives and works)

1.3 Definition and characterization of the community

(Possible mentioning of the Rule of Life or CA'09,5 about our "professed identity"; or, in turn, summarize the result of a communitarian sharing on the "ideal vision" that each confrere has of his own community)

1.4 Meaningful moments for the life of the community during the year

(With possible reference to the previous year, preview the events of special relevance for the life of the community, be it specifically of the community or regarding the life of the Province, the Institute and the local Church)

1.5 Priority objectives for the current year

(These objectives should not be "many", but two or three, taking into account the provincial programming or the circumstances of the life and growth of the community)

Part One

Brotherly Community of Disciples and Missionaries (CA'09,22)

2. **SPIRITUALITY – Welcome the new life of the Spirit**

CA'09,22: "We want to be missionaries open to the action of God in us; missionaries who live meeting the Lord as disciples wholly consecrated to mission, called to live a deep affective and effective relationship with Jesus in order to be witnesses of his love..."

- Which concrete objective do we want to develop and grow in our Comboni missionary spirituality?
- Two moments of communitarian prayer (RL 52): which ones and when?
- Arrangement about the place for prayer, preparation of the celebrations, one-in charge...
- Daily Eucharist of the community (RL 53.1; CA'09, 27a)
- Monthly retreat: to fix the day of the month and the concrete way to have it - as community, individually, with another neighbouring community, with the Diocese?...
- Other particular moments: example 1° Fridays, Advent time and Lent...
- Spiritual Exercises (CA'09, 37)

3. **FRATERNITY – To build a brotherly community**

CA'09, 32: "Living as brothers is a fundamental and indispensable element of our spiritual growth and missionary service. In order to reach this goal we must dedicate the time and attention required."

- Which concrete objective do we want to develop in order to grow in fraternity?
- Fix the day of the week for community day (cf. RL 39.4) and what it defines it: Eucharist, community meeting, and other signs of fraternity...
- Community Council: when, modality, animator, responsible for the minutes...
- How "to favour a sharing of the inner life that would allow us to reach a deeper brotherly communion" (CA'09, 26): to establish moments, initiatives and modalities of sharing of life (CA'09 ,33.1.3) as well as ways of "practice of fraternal correction" (CA'09, 33.4)
- How to foster the "attention to the person" among the confreres of the community (health, shortcoming of sickness and old age...)
- Special occasions of fraternity, feasts, birthdays...: arrangements and confrere in-charge

- Moments of rest, socials, and communitarian outings (CA'09, 33.2): how and when?
- Holidays, absence and going out of the community: guidelines
- How to foster the relationship with the province: relationship with neighbouring communities, participation in the zonal and provincial meetings...
- How to live out in openness the communion with the local church: participation in the diocesan meetings, welcoming of the diocesan clergy...
- Arrangements for the welcoming, in-charge...
- Guidelines, criteria and responsible of charity versus the poor
- Dealing with collaborators and workers: guidelines and responsible person.

4. ONGOING FORMATION – To make the community “the favourable place” of OGF

CA'09, 137: “OGF is the pivot of our renewal. It has become a determining factor not only for our life and apostolic efficacy but also for the future of the Institute. Only a community that takes OGF seriously can attract, by its inherent vitality and fruitfulness, new and authentic vocations.”

- Which particular objective do we want to achieve in our OGF?
- How can our community favour the personal practice of the discipline of spiritual life (Personal Project of Life, personal prayer, spiritual direction...)
- Choose of “at least half a day per week free from commitments of work” (RL 39.4)
- Define the “plan” of OGF of the community: moments of spiritual reading and OGF, participation in the initiatives of OGF of the province and of the local church, particular initiatives of OGF...
- How to “recover the Rule of Life”, according to the request of the Chapter: continuous Reading (CA'09, 31.2)
- Maintain a small “communitarian library” at the disposal of the confreres as well as a place of disposal of some magazines and newspapers chosen by the community for their updating Reading
- Take care of the notice board of the community: in-charge...

5. ECONOMY – Promote sharing, sobriety and transparency

CA'09, 149: “The principal dimensions that we wish to promote are: brotherly sharing through the TCF, a simple style of life and the responsible and transparent administration of resources in order to serve the mission and the poorest.”

- Which concrete objective do we propose ourselves as community for this year?
- How to favour economical co-responsibility, sharing, sobriety and transparency...
- How to promote a style of life simpler and more sober: initiatives of renouncing...
- Plan the communitarian discernment about expenses
- Programming the communitarian handling and coordination of the projects
- Preview for the monthly economic report of each confrere, the community, and projects.

Part Two

A Community in Mission

NB: This part of the Communitarian Project presents the inspiring principles and the founding orientations in view of the pastoral programming. It will be part of the Pastoral Plan, which will be in turn, prepared together with the other pastoral agents of the parish.

6. PASTORAL PROJECT OF THE COMMUNITY

(CA'09, 56: "Our Institute was born of and for mission and the Comboni Missionary 'makes evangelization the reason of his own life'" [RL 56].)

6.1 Requalification of our missionary service

(CA'09, 56.6: "In order to remain faithful to the prophetic spirit of its call, our Institute must renew and make present its charisma. It is necessary to undertake radical choices in order to reach marginalised and not yet evangelised peoples, having as a priority the proclamation of the Word of God.")

- Detect the challenges and urgencies of evangelization at the level of our parish/mission
- Make clear the "radical choices" that we can make at our level in order to remain more faithful to our specific charisma
- To precise in a concrete way the call to evangelize as a "cenacle of apostles." (CA'09, 58.4)

6.2 Our priorities and pastoral strategies

(AC 59.3: "In the context of the requalification of commitments, communities are requested in the annual updating of their charters, to identify their pastoral priorities and to ensure a balance between commitments accepted and confreres available.)

- Priority Objectives for this pastoral year
- Attention should be given to the situations of "first evangelization" present in our territory (mission, parish, zone, etc...) (CA'09, 56.9)
- Division of the persons in-charge and their pastoral responsibilities among the members of the community (valuing the role of the brother where he is present)
- Fix the communitarian meeting for programming and evaluating regularly the pastoral activity.

7. PROJECT OF MISSIONARY ANIMATION OF THE COMMUNITY

(CA'09, 179: "MA must be understood not only as an expression of our identity and the Comboni charisma but also as a source of renewal.")

7.1 Renew our Missionary Animation

(CA'09, 180: "Changes in society, the Church and the Institute challenge us to a deep renewal in the way we understand and put into practice this essential dimension of our charisma.")

- Main initiatives to be programmed (October, World Mission Sunday, Comboni feasts...)
- "Day of the Mission" in our parish and in our diocese: objectives, method and collaboration with other agents
- Spreading of the missionary magazines and other material of MA: a concrete commitment of the community
- Commitment of the community in the promotion of the Lay Comboni Missionaries and the follow up of the network of benefactors and friends: organization, initiatives, meetings, in-charge person...
- Collaboration with the Provincial Secretariat of MA and insertion in the local church
- In-charge of MA of the community

7.2 To Promote Vocations

(CA'09, 57.1: "In today's world people attribute more credibility to testimonies rather than teachers, to concrete love rather than theories. Bearing witness involves each individual missionary and community that, in its turn, becomes a living sign of the values of the Kingdom.")

16

- Creation of a vocational group: organization, meetings, in-charge...
- Moments of sensitization and awareness of the Christian community: World Mission Sunday, Vocational Week...
- Prayer for Vocations: initiatives (1st Friday of the month...)

7.3. Become a formative community

(CA'09, 77: "We also note a split between the formative proposal and the reality of everyday Comboni life, where certain of our limitations (activism and apostolic individualism, weakness in the spiritual life, the comfortable style of life ...etc.) are a counter-witness that seriously compromises formation work.)

- Review the style of life of our community at the light of CA'09, 11.3
- To be available to collaboration with the houses of formation of the province.
- Provisions to welcome postulants, novices and scholastics (holidays, community experience pastoral service...

Conclusion

8. EVALUATION

CA'09, 40: "Community councils are in their turn occasions for an evaluation of the community project in general and of the lives of individual members of the community."

- Preview moments of evaluation and periodical revision of the community programming.

9. ATTACHMENTS

- Timetable of the community
- Services and responsibilities of the members of the community
- Annual calendar of the activities and main commitments of the community

Rome, 10th October 2011
Fr. Manuel João P. Correia

2. PASTORAL PLAN Scheme for Elaboration

The Plan or the Pastoral Project is to be prepared in dialogue with all the pastoral agents who work within the territory of the mission or parish, bearing in mind the orientations of the local church. For an efficacious action, it is important that the objectives and the priorities of the pastoral year – likewise the main strategies of action we want to achieve – are clear stated, known and shared by all pastoral collaborators and agents.

We are aware that the reality of our communities is very diverse and that this scheme might not reflect their complexity. We offer, even thought, this tool with the hope of being a help to someone.

1. Introduction

- Presentation of the Parish/Mission/pastoral area: a short historical notes, composition, geographical area, statistics...
- Ecclesial and socio-cultural context: short description, highlighting challenges, emergencies, problems...

2. Our pastoral priorities and strategies

(AC 59,3: "In the context of the requalification of commitments, communities are requested in the annual updating of their charters, to identify their pastoral priorities and to ensure a balance between commitments accepted and confreres available)

- Priority objectives for the current year (few and precise)
- Stages and means to achieve them: specifying time, concrete actions and agents
- Attention to the situations of "first evangelization" presented in the territory of the parish/mission (CA'09, 56.9): establish a) the concrete objectives for the pastoral year (new presences, initiatives...), b) the strategies of action (means to be privileged: social actions, first announcement...) and c) the pastoral agents that we should made use of...
- Division of the ones in-charged and the pastoral responsibilities (among the pastoral agents)
- Fix the meetings at the level of "apostolic community" for programming and evaluate regularly the apostolic activities

3. Pastoral Accompaniment of the Christian Community

(CA'09, 58.3: "Mission implies being near to the people, involving ourselves affectively and effectively in their lives.")

- Centre of the parish: planning the sacramental assistance, accompaniment of the groups and associations, distribution of tasks...
- Secondary stations: strategies of evangelization, modality and timing of the celebration of the sacraments, involvement of the different pastoral agents...

4. Catechesis and Catechumenate

(CA'09, 57.3: This is the heralding of the Kingdom of God shown in Jesus Christ. It requires a process of inculturation, understood as a recognition of those cultural values that are not in contradiction to the Gospel, the employment of appropriate language, and a style of life coherent and in harmony with that of the people.)

- Duration, organization, tasks (scrutiny) of the catechumenate...
- Accompaniment of catechumenate (coordinator, visit to the catechumens...)
- Choose of the materials and means to be made available to the catechists...

5. Formation and coordination of the pastoral agents

(CA'09, 58.5: "Mission is a service to the Gospel to be accomplished in communion and collaboration, and not in an individualistic way. As Comboni Missionaries we cooperate with the Comboni Family, the local Church and its pastoral agents, and civil society: this is the way to build a truly apostolic Church.")

- Pastoral Parish Counsel and committee of the community (updating and formation of the members of the committee, guidelines of the statutes about the organization and periodicity of the meetings...)
- Catechists: meetings of formation and programming, objectives of the year for the catechesis, in-charge of their accompaniment...
- Formation of leaders: which groups or persons to be privileged, with which initiatives and means...
- Coordination of the pastoral service: report with the local church and the other pastoral agents present in the parish/mission

6. Specialized Pastoral

(CA'09, 58.1" It is the mission that shows the way and the means necessary for true renewal. Mission tells us how to be missionaries and invites us to a humble and on-going attitude of listening to the needs of the peoples.")

- Pastoral of the family: initiatives for the preparation of the marriage and the accompaniment of the couple, in-charged ones, collaborators...
- Attention to the pastoral of the schools: religious presence, spiritual accompaniment of the teachers...
- Pastoral of the Youth: initiatives, in-charge, collaborators...

7. JPIC and Interreligious Dialogue

(CA'09, 186: "Commitment to JPIC is taken on as a constitutive element of the proclamation of the Gospel and of MA; it stimulates us to a personal and coherent witness of a sober style of life, collaborating with whoever is already serving in this field."; CA'09, 58.8: "The ability to dialogue is one of the most urgent needs in our ever more complex and pluralistic world.")

- Steps to take in order to start or renew the parish committee of JPIC
- Possible initiatives of awareness for the Christian community
- Choice of one confrere in-charge of this field
- How to cultivate "the preoccupation with the last ones" (CA'09, 56.9): which groups and which actions...
- Establish in a concrete way some initiatives of interreligious and ecumenical dialogue during the pastoral year
- How to face and consider the challenges of Islam and sects?

8. Pastoral of Vocations and Missionary Animation

(CA'09, 183: "As an integral part of our charisma MA has the aim of making the local Churches aware of their responsibility to announce the message of Christ beyond their own frontiers.")

- Creation of a vocational group: organization, meetings, in-charge ...
- Vocational sensitization: prayer, vocational week...
- Creation of a missionary group: organization, meetings, in-charge...
- Initiatives of missionary animation: October, World Mission Sunday, "day of the mission"...
- Spreading of material of missionary animation

9. Development Projects

(CA'09, 58.2: "It is necessary that we work in such a way as to allow the local Church to continue its mission even after we have left them. This requires us to collaborate in the building of a ministerially and materially self-sufficient Church (self-ministering, self-supporting and self-propagating), investing in structures and pastoral projects that are self-sustaining even after our departure.")

- Programing of the projects to be promoted: priority of the pastoral year...
- Accompaniment of the on-going projects: situation, interventions to make, the one in-charge (valuing the role of the brother where he is present)
- Guidelines for the involvement of the people and the local church

10. Conclusion

- Moments of evaluation and periodical revision of the pastoral plan
- **Attachments:** calendar of the pastoral year; list of the communities, chapels, outstations, groups, associations, pastoral agents...

3. WEEKLY COMMUNITY DAY

A day to talk of Mission...

1. The growing need of a “community day”

The “community day” has become a **common practice** in many provinces and Comboni communities, after the Chapter of 1969. The Rule of Life does not mention it directly, but states that “once a week”, the Eucharist should be celebrated with “a special solemnity”, in order “to strengthen the bonds of brotherhood and to express the joy of living together in the Lord” (53.1), a practice already proposed by the 1975 Chapter (p. 54).

Every day should be a “community day” for us but the “dispersion” caused by the multiplicity and diversity of commitments can lead us sometimes to neglect the common life, weakening the “community spirit”. Unfortunately, the combination of **activism-individualism** is a worm that often undermines the strength of our communities. The main purpose of this “day” is therefore to cultivate in a special way the value of community life and, more especially, its spiritual and apostolic renewal.

To reserve a particular day each week, free of other work commitments, to come together as a “fellowship of disciples and missionaries” (CA n° 22) is a **right** and a **need**. As the twelve who meet joyful around the Master to share their experience of mission: *“The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported all they had done and taught. And he said to them: Come apart into a deserted place and rest a while”* (Mk 6.30-31).

The urgent need to **qualify our community life** and renew ourselves has always been emphasized by our Chapters, often in very similar terms (both in the diagnosis of the problems and in the proposed remedies!). A sign of progress, if there is any, would be almost imperceptible. In fact, there is a significant gap between the “ideal”

proposed by the RL and our documents, often “flying high”, and the concrete reality of our communities, often moving at ground level, according to a logic of the “lowest common denominator” values.

The “community day” would not only deepen our interpersonal relationships but also stimulate our ongoing formation (OGF), called by the Chapter 2009 “the pivot of our renewal..., a determining factor not only for our life and apostolic efficacy but also for the future of the Institute” (AC’09 n° 137). In fact, the local community is “the most favourable place for OGF”, as often repeated in our official documents (see RL 100.2; Ratio n° 530, CA’09, n° 140.2).

A community that tries to live creatively its “community day” can find in this initiative a real **spring of renewal**, a weekly space to “recharge” itself in all senses.

2. The main purpose of the “community day”: sharing of life

An essential qualification of the “community day” is the sharing of life. The need was particularly stressed by the Chapter 2009. Our spiritual sharing is, unfortunately, very poor and superficial. We recognise that many communities and groups of lay Christians involved in a journey of faith may be an example in this area. Because of a strange sense of modesty or a strange kind of respect for everyone’s privacy, our communities seem unable to reach a real communion, being simple working communities. Interpersonal relationships can be friendly but they are often superficial. Formality prevails on friendship. But, above all, we lack confidence to share at a deeper level our lives.

For this the **Chapter** says: *“We feel the desire to overcome the tendency to consider spirituality an exclusively personal fact, in order to favour a sharing of the inner life that would allow us to reach a deeper brotherly communion. We will obtain this in the measure in which we accept to put the action of the Spirit at the head of our priorities, determining to consider our lives from the point of view of faith”* (CA’09, n° 26).

The “community day”, well managed, can help and qualify our fraternal sharing, making us to pass from the level of the head (the sharing of ideas) to that of the **heart** (the sharing of life and feelings).

3. How to organize the “community day”

The first thing to do is **to fix the day** of the week. The community establishes in its Project the day set aside as the “community day”. This depends on the commitments of its members. It is not always easy to find a “free” day suitable for everyone. But excellent can be an enemy of good. We must adapt ourselves to reality. Many apostolic communities choose Monday, less busy after the apostolic commitments on Sunday. Others tend to focus on Friday, as a day linked with our charism of the Sacred Heart. Others prefer Saturday, if there are academic or professional commitments... The important thing is that this day, once fixed, is respected by all.

The “community day” is not - necessarily - to be spent all together. It could be linked with the weekly personal half-day, free of work commitments (RL 39.4). But it would be very convenient that it is **characterized by the weekly Eucharist** - as its peak moment - to be celebrated with a “special solemnity” (RL 53.1) and giving space for life sharing.

Some communities combine the 4 “community days” of the month with some **special community meetings**. For example:

- 1) the monthly planning meeting;
- 2) ongoing formation;
- 3) the community council;
- 4) the monthly retreat...

How to set concretely the “community day”? We should not think of it as a reality stereotyped and formal, repeating the same formula every week. It can be conducted in a variety of ways. In addition, it should not be too heavy and tiring, and above all never... boring!

Here we have some initiatives that could be part of the “community day”:

- The celebration of the Eucharist well animated, with ample space given to sharing.
- The celebration of the Word (Lectio) with fraternal sharing, or another type of celebration (such as a penitential service, in special liturgical seasons).
- Eucharistic adoration, as a moment to pray together, for example for vocations.
- The monthly recollection, well prepared and with a theme chosen by the confreres.
- The community council (ordinary or extraordinary).
- An OGF initiative or meeting.
- The community and pastoral planning meeting.
- A meeting with neighbouring communities (zonal meeting).
- An outing of the community...

Programmed with some creativity, respected by all its members, the “weekly community day” can become a real “breath” for community life, a “day made by the Lord” (Ps 118.24), where we experience the joy of living together among brothers (Ps 133.1).

Rome, 10th October 2011
Fr. Manuel João P. Correia

4. COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Mirror of a Missionary Community...

1. INTRODUCTION

- The Community Council (CC) has become a **tradition** in our Institute, a privileged tool for animation and organization of community life. A good community journey, in its fraternal life and apostolic service, depends, largely, on it. One might even say that the CC becomes the “mirror” of the community. Fidelity to the CC and the quality of its development offers an assurance of fraternal life and apostolic dynamism in the community.
- The CC is somehow an implementation of the regulations of the **Canon Law** concerning the exercise of authority in religious life, which requires that the superiors have a permanent council in the exercise of their office (CIC 422.1, see also CIC 627 and PC 14).

2. SOME HISTORICAL NOTES

- 2.1** The “Family Council” (another name for the same reality) is one of the fruits of the Vatican Council renewal process implemented by our **1969 Special Chapter**. *“To keep alive the sense of community and make it active, there will be frequent meetings of the Family Council: either ordinary, for information, discussion and proposals, or extraordinary, whenever necessary. The Superior, therefore, calls periodically the community to study the various problems which concern the community and find together effective solutions. Of course this doesn’t prevent - especially in larger communities - the establishment of a restricted council for smaller administrative matters. Even in this case, however, the community must be informed”* (Chapter Documents ‘69, p. 107).

- The 1969 Chapter offers also comprehensive and concrete **guidelines** for the organization of the “Family Council” (see pp. 479-483): *“In a climate of dialogue and in the spirit of co-responsibility of all members of the religious-apostolic community, it is necessary that the whole family participates in the local Council, at least as regards the performance of the house and the problems of common interest ... They must take place regularly and frequently. Avoid, however, falling into formalism”* (p. 479).
 - These guidelines are repeated in a **letter** of the General Council **on Community Life** (10/10/1970) which underlines: *“In order not to reduce our Family Councils to useless chatting, they need to follow a methodology”* (Bulletin of the Congregation, No. 92 <1970>, p. 10).
- 2.2** The CC passed on to the **Rule of Life** (RL) as a legal instrument of support for the Government of the Comboni religious community: *“True brotherhood cannot be created without frequent encounters. Every community meets regularly for the Community Council...”* (RL 39.2). In No. 111, the RL defines and gives concrete guidelines for its development.
- The Provincial **Directory** should clarify “the competence, frequency and procedure of the Community Council meetings” (RL 111.5).
- 2.3** Our **General Chapters** have continued to emphasize the value of community life and in some of them we find references to the CC.
- The **1975 Chapter** reaffirms the guidelines issued by the CD’69, *“as the way offered to us by the Spirit to renew a continuous renewal”* (p. 48). It notes the benefits of the “Family Council” (p. 47), proposes its improvement (p. 125) and provides new motivations, exhortations and guidelines (pp. 57-59), which are still valid. Highlights especially the “fraternal dialogue” and underlines that the fact that the majority of the communities are formed by only two or three members *“should not be an*

- argument for neglecting the Family Council, replaced by a simple informal dialogue”* (p. 58). In addition, the CC is related with the “apostolic community” (“*The regular dialogue promoted by the Family Council, will also be expanded, with regard to pastoral issues, to the apostolic community*”, p. 58) and the Comboni nearby communities (“zone meetings”, p. 58).
- The **1985 Chapter** highlights the need to qualify the CC: “*The CC has to become an opportunity for ongoing formation, especially for discernment and evaluation, and not just a meeting to plan the activities*” (CA’85, No. 29).
 - The last **2009 Chapter** asked the provincial councils “*to ensure that communities use the tools foreseen by the RL for the animation of the communities*”, and among these, first, the CC (cf. CA’09 , No. 13.1).

3. PURPOSE OF THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

- According to the **Rule of Life**, “*the Community Council is the meeting of all the members to seek the common good, to promote fraternal communion, to plan and verify their activities, and to participate in all important decisions of the community*” (RL 111).
- According to this “definition” of the RL, the CC is not just a meeting set by the need to agree on some decisions but, above all, an encounter, an experience and **exercise of fraternity** to promote communion. The CC becomes a “school” of fraternity: patient listening, respect for diversity, control over emotions, appreciation of differences, acceptance of others... The CC, of course, must take into account the diversity of people who compose the community, the role and service they perform and their personal situation.
- The purpose of the CC is to **search for the will of God**: “*The Community Council is the ordinary occasion when the community (...) seeks the will of God through communal discernment*” (RL 111.1).

- Some of the **concrete issues** that the CC is called to reflect upon are specified by the RL 111.2: *“to review its life-style, its commitments and the manner in which they are put into practice”*. See also RL 29.2, 31.5, 39.2, 174.
- To live the CC as an exercise of fraternity and seeking the will of God requires a set of **attitudes**. Here’s how P. Carmelo Casile presents the needs for an active and responsible participation in the CC (vd subsidy *“Il Consiglio di Comunità. Un mezzo per diventare persone comunitarie”*, Rome 2000, p. 8):
 - * **Speak up** - *the meeting is yours. Tell what you think. Your ideas on the subject have the same value as that of others. “Nobody is so poor that he has nothing to give and none is so rich that he has nothing to receive”*.
 - * **Listen carefully** to what others say - *put in an effort to understand the views of others, look for reasons that could support their claims, especially if they have a different opinion.*
 - * **Avoid interrupting** the speaker – *wait that the other finishes his thoughts. Make your comments at the appropriate time.*
 - * **Avoid monopolizing** the dialogue – *say what it is essential, leaving aside the pointless arguments and grumblings: leave room for others.*
 - * **If you do not agree** with something, say it: *with ease and good humour, not to show yourself, with aggression, or moved by controversy.*
 - * **Avoid alienating** yourself from the meeting – *take part in it with interest. Ask questions. Offer material. Give your contribution from your experience. Keep a positive attitude.*
- The CC is also a **juridical organ** of support to the superior in the government of the community. Because of that the CC must take into account the importance of different subject matters. Thus, “in important matters listed in the Provincial Directory”, the superior needs the consent of the majority of the community council (VR 111.2). Other decisions require instead only a consultative vote.

4. ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

The importance of CC for the fraternal vitality and ministerial fecundity of a community invites us to value more this practice and not to leave it to improvisation. Here are some guidelines and requirements that may contribute to its smooth running.

- The RL does not specify the **frequency** of the CC, leaving this task to the provincial directories (RL 11.5). It speaks only of the need of being convened “regularly” (RL 39.2; 111.2). The regularity ensures continuity. The “tradition” created about this practice advises to have it at least once a month. Anyway, this frequency should be established in the Project or Community Charter, possibly indicating the exact day of the week and month.
- The CC should have some **official** character (without falling into formalism!) to distinguish it from other more frequent planning meetings or (informal) moments to decide on any punctual and urgent matter. This official character helps to ensure a more systematic and reflected preparation, giving the confreres time to study the agenda. Besides, it contributes to keep an attitude of true discernment on the topics.
- It is fitting that the **agenda** of the CC is exposed a few days before in order that all members of the community may view it, reflect on issues and possibly propose others.
- The “official character requires the **minutes** of the CC (RL 111.2), prepared by a secretary, to be read and approved at the beginning of the next CC.
- The agenda and minutes must take into account the **confidentiality** of certain themes. As a precaution, we shouldn’t write in the minutes matters of personal confidential sharing. For the same reason, the agenda and the minutes of the CC shouldn’t be exposed in a public place. The circumstances will dictate whether or not to expose them. It seems more advisable to give a personal copy to each of the confreres.

- The role of the **facilitator** is important for the good running of the CC. Usually, it is the superior who convenes and presides over, but he may delegate another member of the community (especially in the case of a larger community).
- It's important that each member can express himself freely and that we listen to the confrere. For this we must have sufficient time to discuss the arguments. The **duration** of the CC might normally be an hour and a half to two hours. In extraordinary cases, it is better to provide two sessions of the CC, or take a break.
- The CC should retain its character as a special opportunity for community **discernment**. For this it is advisable to program the CC alternating with other meetings of "common administration" that does not require a particular discernment. This frees the CC of the pressure to have many matters to discuss. A CC with many points in the agenda could easily overlook the arguments and lack to give the time required for a true discernment. The ideal would be to have a short weekly meeting for the ordinary planning, possibly on the "community day", reserving the CC to discuss important issues or topics.
- The CC is a moment of qualified community life. So it could be programmed to occur in the so-called "**community day**". It is picking up in some communities the tradition of combining the weekly day reserved for the community with some special meetings: 1) the monthly planning, 2) meeting of ongoing formation, 3) the CC, 4) the monthly retreat...
- The **small community** consisting of two or three confreres, might consider it unnecessary to have the CC, rather relying on informal meetings, deciding and planning their lives and activities maybe at the table after a meal... But experience teaches that without a real and regular CC, and then done with a certain degree of formality, some topics are not addressed, and there will be hardly a discernment on the issues.

- In **larger communities**, however, it may be useful to have a “restricted council”, as the RL 111.4 says: “In addition to the regular meetings, larger communities may delegate certain tasks to a sub-Council comprising only some of the members elected by the community”.
- Even in **formation houses** (including novitiates) it is recommended that the religious community has its own CC, as well as that of the novitiate community.

5. ORDINARY MODALITY OF CC

There are different ways of organizing the CC, according to the type of arguments to be treated or the aim to be achieved. To alternate it can also help to make it more fruitful.

We present here an ordinary modality of a CC, which seeks to integrate the different elements. Of course, it has to be adapted according to circumstances.

As a premise, we would say that it is convenient that the CC may have two key moments: the first, which guarantees a space of fraternal sharing (on a theme of ongoing formation or an aspect of life or community service); the second, for the discussion of practical issues (in agenda) that require more time to share opinions and suggestions of all the confreres.

5.1 Opening Prayer

Prepared (in advance) and made by a member of the community.

5.2 Moment of ongoing formation (OGF)

- The topic of OGF would be presented by a member of the community and may be open to dialogue. It could be a reference to a document or event related with the Church, the Institute or the Province...

This first moment of the CC should not be too long, unless it is a CC of OGF or fraternal sharing.

5.3 Reading of the minutes of the previous CC

To be approved, after comments or remarks.

5.4 **The agenda**

Presented by the superior or by the moderator. The members of the community may add other topics to the agenda.

This should cover, in principle, the following areas:

a) **Major themes to be analysed**

These are topics that require more discernment. These may emerge from the life and service of the community or be proposed by the life of the Church, Comboni Institute or Province...

b) **Monthly economic report**

Presented by the bursar.

c) **Other matters**

Information and administrative decisions.

5.5 **Calendar of the month**

Program of activities and special events of the community and of each member of the community for the next month (sharing of information).

5.6 **Conclusion**

To remember or fix the date of the next CC and to conclude with a prayer.

6. **EXTRAORDINARY MODALITIES OF CC**

It would be appropriate to change the mode of implementation of the CC, especially when you deal with more specific objectives. In these cases it is good to leave any other points for another CC or community meeting, in order to deal with the topic well and give the time necessary for that purpose.

We could consider some particular modalities of CC like:

- A special **meeting of OGF** on a particular theme, proposed at the level of our Institute, Province or Church (see, for example, the “annual theme of spirituality” proposed by the Chapter);

- A special session to make **discernment** about an issue, a particular topic, a major challenge facing the community;
- The annual **planning and evaluation** (global or partial) of the life of the community;
- A CC of **fraternal sharing** for communication of life, dialogue of mutual spiritual enrichment, or fraternal correction/promotion (particularly in Advent and Lent).

NB: In case of barriers to dialogue between members of the community or when there are brothers that (maybe because of their formation or hard character) find it difficult to open up, we must proceed gradually, with patience and discretion. The sharing of life becomes difficult in these cases, but we can always try a type of sharing less demanding, such as around a theme of OGF.

Creativity is an important element to keep the attention and interest of the community, and to respect life ... which is always NEW! ...

Fr. Manuel João P. Correia
Rome, 10.10.2011

5. LIFE SHARING

To grow in Fraternity

From the Planning Guidelines and Action Plan - at Community level - of the General Chapter 2009:

“To sustain community life which should be the place for personal and apostolic growth, reinforcing our identity as ‘men of communion’. Communities should favour and cultivate moments of reciprocal listening and sharing, identifying simple ways to help create a family atmosphere and a sense of belonging. In the community charters they should also plan for fraternal promotion and correction.” (CA’09, 143 and 143.1)

As often happens, the clarity of our documents does not match the practice in everyday life, but the value of the document remains in the direction in which we are called to operate in fidelity to what the Lord asks from us through the privileged discernment done in a General Chapter.

Speaking of the importance of communication of life I mention a text of the *Promessi Sposi* quoted by Isingrini, where he describes the encounter between the protagonist, Renzo, returning to his hometown, and his friend:

“Si misero insieme a tavola, ringraziandosi scambievolmente, l’uno della visita, l’altro del ricevimento. E, dopo un’assenza di forse due anni, si trovarono a un tratto molto più amici di quello che avesser mai saputo d’essere nel tempo che si vedevano quasi ogni giorno... Raccontò anche lui all’amico le sue vicende, e n’ebbe in contraccambio cento storie, del passaggio dell’esercito, della peste, d’untori, di prodigi. “Son cose brutte”, disse l’amico, accompagnando Renzo in una

camera che il contagio aveva resa disabitata; “cose che non si sarebbe mai creduto di vedere; come da levarvi l’allegria per tutta la vita; ma però, a parlarne tra amici, è un sollievo”.

Even the most painful experiences, when shared with friends or brothers united by the same faith and the common vocation, can be a relief!

“The communion is born from the sharing of fruits of the Spirit, a sharing of faith and in faith, where the bond of brotherhood is stronger the more central and vital is what is put in common” (Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor, n° 32).

The communication of life refers to the experience of the person and not to ideas or theories which, while interesting, do not give the life experience of the individual. For us, it is nourished by two dimensions or areas of our lives:

- 1) What one lives and feels, particularly in community life and ministry;
- 2) Our own experience of God.

There is no doubt that the two areas are closely linked because God is experienced in what we live, but can be useful to bear in mind both dimensions, the first being characterized more by our emotions and the second by our reflection on the experience to discover the presence of the Lord.

In the life of our communities it is vital to plan the times and places for a communication of life among its members.

A very auspicious occasion may be during the day of the monthly retreat, as well as community programming during the year and during the review of the year.

It is helpful to offer some questions that can help this communication that we are not usually accustomed to.

Here are some possible questions to suit the situation of each community:

- 1) In this period (may be referred to the past month, or year, or...), how did I feel and how do I feel:
 - a. in relation with the confreres of the community
 - b. in the role I have in the community
 - c. in my ministry
- 2) What is the experience of God that I did and I'm doing?
- 3) What is my experience of prayer?
- 4) What makes me feel a Comboni in what I am living?

People who are not accustomed to this type of communication may find difficulties and resistances, but if you do not start and persevere, never will there be a change.

In introducing this exercise, as well as motivating the importance for the life of the community, it isn't a waste of time to insist that the goal is to share personal experiences and not to make theories or "intellectualization".

When the community has at least one person who starts to communicate at this level, it will help others to walk in that direction. The example of someone, in this case is crucial.

The attentive listening and profound respect for what the other is communicating are the key to the success of this exercise.

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Rome, 10.10.2011

6. COMMUNITY FRATERNAL HELP

To grow in fraternal communion

“The practice of fraternal correction and reconciliation with God and the brothers in a climate of celebration, particularly during the high moments of the liturgical year, are ideal means for evaluating and nurturing our community life” (CA’09, 33.4).

The Chapter stresses again the importance of the correction / fraternal promotion in 143.1: “Communities should favour and cultivate moments of reciprocal listening and sharing, identifying simple ways to help create a family atmosphere and a sense of belonging. In the community charters they should also plan for fraternal promotion and correction”.

In the life of our communities, we notice how difficult it is the practice of this exercise. There is the fear that we can arrive at an aggressive communication, instead of helping the community to grow in fraternity, it may give rise to further conflicts and injuries.

The dynamic that I propose has two stages: in the 1st each confrere will make himself known in the aspects of the self that hardly we communicate with one another; the 2nd moment, points at the promotion and fraternal correction, as a feedback of the confreres to the one who has shared about himself, to overcome resistances that can be felt among us when we do this exercise.

Here is the description of the dynamics:

1st moment: a member of the community shares of himself to the brothers of his community, following this sequence:

- The activities that I like most and those that are like a burden.
- My character: I consider myself an introvert or an extrovert, passive or active, emotional or unemotional, with tendency to work (functional) or to be with others; perfectionist or not...

- The qualities and potentials that I think I have.
- My limitations and defects.
- What bothers me most in relation to others.
- My concerns and fears.
- The existential moment I am living.
- How I feel in my community and ministry.

Note: The level of sharing of this first moment should be free and up to the person to decide. The important thing is that we share on a personal level, to avoid intellectualization, in the knowing that a deep and personal sharing motivates listeners to share at the same level of depth.

2nd moment: after listening to the communication of the brother, the other members of the community communicate their feedback as an expression of their fraternal promotion:

We suggest the following steps:

- My resonance to your sharing (what the confrere mentioned in the 1st moment).
- The qualities and potentials that I see in you.
- What I appreciate most in your own person.
- I see these values in your attitudes...
- I think that our community is helped by you in these aspects...
- In my relationship with you I feel... because...
- I felt/feel helped by you in... because...
- I think you could give more attention to these aspects of your person...
- Something that I would like to tell you at the end of my sharing...

A sharing to the level proposed by this community is dynamic when it is taken freely by all the confreres and by the community as a whole, becomes an opportunity for personal and community growth.

Some observations for the good use of this dynamic:

- 1) When to use it? When the community lives in an atmosphere quite peaceful, with no deep conflicts.

- 2) Who offers it? The superior of the community or another community member. The important thing is to be presented to a community council, indicating the motivation and the goal.
- 3) The necessary condition in order to be useful for the community is that this initiative is accepted freely by all members. To do so it may be useful to give a time after the presentation, for example a week, in order that each one may reflect on the proposal of such a dynamic and then to take the decision together.
- 4) This dynamic can be used once or twice a year: Advent and Lent can be a good opportunity.
- 5) How to use the scheme? It seems useful to maintain the two moments, the 1st in which the person exposes himself, speaking of himself, and the 2nd where he can listen to the feedback that the brothers share with him. The elements for the two moments can be modified to better fit the reality of the community.
- 6) The two moments can be made in the same meeting, or in two separate meetings.
- 7) Two rules that we should consider:
 - a. What everyone shares is welcomed without being contradicted, leading to a discussion;
 - b. What has been said is not shared with any other people.
- 8) An important criterion to consider in this sharing is that if what I say to my brother is moved by anger or resentment towards him, we better not tell him because it is likely that my sharing will not be constructive.

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Rome, 10.10.2011

7. LIFE PERSONAL PROJECT

To grow in creative faithfulness

1. INTRODUCTION

TO THE LIFE PERSONAL PROJECT

The life personal project (LPP) defines the objectives and values that the person wants to live, and indicates the steps to be taken and the efficacious means needed to make them life's attitudes.

It represents the compass that orientates in the personal journey whose aim is to grow in the creative faithfulness to the vocation received by the Lord and, consequently in the true self-fulfilment, in the full development and growth: as individual, as consecrated person, and, for us, as Comboni missionary.

It is a privileged means of discernment through which, we identify the "journey" that God proposes to us and orientate our response in everyday life towards the maturity that is the measure of the stature of the fullness in Christ (see Eph. 4:13). It indicates therefore a journey that must be done with the One who has indicated it.

The LPP stimulates the person towards a greater awareness of one's own personal reality and involves more in the life choice that has been made. It responds to a personal attitude with which what somebody wants to make of his life, is expressed.

It is an efficacious aid in order to internalize the values.

It starts from what the person really is, where he is situated (=Actual Self) and by what he is identified with, towards what is called to walk (=Ideal Self). Reflecting on the personal reality and the orientation towards the future, it manifests the quality of life to which one aims to.

It does not have a static character but dynamic. It is not prepared once for all life, but is a project in permanent revision.

It represents the expression of a new attitude towards life that is more reflective, more conscious and coherent.

It introduces and makes the person grow in a mentality and attitude of “ongoing formation” that makes life a continual renewal process, where the small and great, ordinary and extraordinary situations become a constant opportunity of psycho-spiritual growth.

It brings to an awareness of the responsibility we have with reference to our formation, that must necessarily be permanent.

2. THE IMPORTANCE AND UTILITY OF THE LPP

We can identify four types of motivations on the usefulness and importance of the LPP:

1) Anthropological

As human beings, we perceive ourselves like beings in making, in a constant process of change and transformation. We are not an already completed and therefore static reality, on the contrary we are a life project that develops step by step through an infinite series of small and great decisions.

We lodge in our inner being a series of existential questions to which we try to give an answer throughout our life.

The searching quest for the answers to these great questions and to our restlessness are weaved in a series of stages, not necessarily linear, that require an attentive analysis and an overall view so that we can understand the trajectory followed until the present moment and the direction towards which it points to in order to continue our advancing.

2) Sociological

In our post-modern society, marked by the pluralism and “fluidity” of opinions on vital questions and by the difficulty to find great collective references to feel totally identified with, the personal task to build convictions and personal attitudes that offer a framework of meaning and reference that orientate our life, is more urgent than ever.

To elaborate a LPP and to have it as a reference for our life is neither “the” way to resolve great existential questions of the human being, nor “the” essential ingredient in the formation of one’s own identity, nor “the” way to transform oneself into the new man, mentioned by Saint Paul.

It is something more modest, but that in our own cultural / social context marked by relativism and transient it can be converted into a tool of great value to advance in all the aspects listed above. And so, it is worth the trouble to know it and to propose it to others.

3) Existential

If we observe our personal and social trajectories, we can realize that many changes take place without the mediation of our conscious will. At the same time, we have the experience that when we leave things going at random, in many occasions either nothing happens or we reach an undesired point.

If we apply these considerations to our process of spiritual growth, we can also observe that many things have happened to us without doing anything to obtain them. In addition, at the same time, we have to recognize that, during other times in which we have allowed the events to lead us, we have not grown, or we have drifted in another direction and even gone backwards in our journey.

Nowadays, no human group that wishes to reach its objectives will take them up without elaborating a project or a plan to obtain them. Individually we are not so used to work in this way even if we do it only in certain aspects of our life, such as programming the time for attending a course or the number of weekly hours to dedicate to sports. However, it would seem strange to us to program all our life, starting from a project approach.

4) Spiritual

In the spiritual life of a person, it is supposed that there is a simultaneous interaction between God and the individual. We could ask ourselves: ”Why should I plan my life if God is going to do anyway what it seems good to Him?”.

If somebody wants to live his existence actively, collaborating consciously with God's action in his process of spiritual growth, he will have more possibilities of advancing if he plans and revises periodically his life from a perspective of faith.

The LPP is a means or an instrument the person uses in order to favour spiritual growth, that is to say to advance in the following (*sequela*) of Jesus and the building of the Kingdom, through a progressive integration process of his life, his faith and the reality in which he lives, aware of the point he starts from (his actual self) and where he is called to go (the ideal self) and what path he is going to use to reach the fixed goal (the necessary means).

The LPP is a tool, a means and as such must be considered and used. There have been many human beings who in the course of history, through their life of faith have achieved what they have been called to be: to become saints without the help of many mediations and instruments that today we know and have at our disposal. The Spirit of God knows how to use the available resources in every moment or situation to improve our response to the action of his grace within us. On the other hand, it is necessary to recognize that the LPP is a wonderful aid for every person, notwithstanding his age.

3. THE DESIRE THAT SUPPORTS THE LPP

A complaint that is often heard is about the difficulty to persevere in living the LPP. There is a risk that after a certain period, the commitments assumed in the project of life remain a dead letter. Among the possible causes, one can be the lack of integration and harmony between the desire, will and decision.

1. The relationship between desire, will and decision.

The desire represents the engine, the energy, the impulse, the direction, the meaning, the warmth for the will. In its turn, the will is the organizing principle of the desire, sees and orientates the steps, finds the necessary instruments and means for the realization of the desire. The will brings to the decision, that if it is the fruit of a sound discernment, will be concrete and realistic.

In this way the desire receives form and concreteness from the will, flowing into decision.

When the will is not sustained and fed by the desire, becomes a cold voluntarism, that wastes many energies, and cannot persevere in time. The desire without the will remains vague, generic, paralysed and sterile.

The integration and harmony between the desire, the will and the decision represents the foundation of the LPP, the motivation that gives the necessary consistency so that it may orientates in fact, our life.

2. The desire that constitutes the indispensable engine for the efficacy of LPP

It is not any desire that gives consistency to LPP.

It must be the desire to grow in truth and authenticity, that often implies a change in my attitude towards life, for a better quality of life. It is the deep desire to live:

- in a more conscious way
- as a responsible subject of my life
- in harmony with the project that God has for myself
- with more coherence with the gospel values
- in fidelity to the vocation and mission received by the Lord

To receive and share more life in a closer correspondence to what God calls me to be, the only source of a true apostolic efficacy.

As it can be seen, the deep motivation of the desire that gives consistency to the LPP cannot be self-centred but God-centred, that is to say the desire to correspond faithfully to the vocation and mission which are gifts from God, welcoming the life he wants to communicate to me (cfr. Jn 10:10) in order to share it with others.

The desire of self-transcendence: egocentric (= the self-overcoming) and philanthropic (= self-giving to others), which finds its strength only in the answer to the love of God (Theo-centric self-transcendence).

It is crucial in this desire, the yearning for something “more” that indicates the direction towards a fuller life in God. It is the

“magis” mentioned by St. Ignatius Loyola in his spiritual exercises. It is the faithfulness to our ontological vocation: to love and serve God (the “Principle and Foundation” in the Ignatian exercises).

Without this deep and strong desire, of a change/growth in our life, the will does not gather enough energy to carry on coherently the LPP.

The ideal situation for the desire to have the strength that brings about a change in one’s own life, is that the person must feel unsatisfied of how he lives, this represents an energy that pushes towards a change, and at the same time, that the person must be attracted by what the Lord proposes (=ideals and gospel values, his own vocation and mission, the truth in the encounter within ourselves and with Him, meeting with his love and mercy), this represents a force that attracts.

When it is possible to add these two forces together, the one that pushes and the other that attracts, it is then that the individual is more motivated and determined to search a change for a greater growth in his own life.

4. CHARACTERISTICS FOR AN EFFICACIOUS LPP

The LPP in order to be efficacious must have these characteristics:

1) **Simple essential and clear**, so, easy to remember and to put into practice.

2) **Concrete**, that is to say very punctual to define the commitments I want to take up. Expressions such as: give prayer more time, make of the Eucharist the centre of the day, be more attentive to my brothers in the community, being more responsible in my ministry, practise sport, to be faithful to the diet, are all beautiful things, but not sufficiently concrete and thus vague, risking not to become concrete attitudes.

3) **Realistic** that can be lived by me in the concrete situation I find myself. An hour of sports per day can be something concrete, but cannot be realistic because it is not possible for me to find daily this time for my activity. An hour of “lectio divina” per day is also concrete, but it cannot be possible due to the rhythm of life I have.

4) **Global/holistic.** As much as possible, it must pay attention to all the dimensions of the person, even if, according to the situation I am living in, I can give particular attention to some dimensions and leave aside others.

5) **Dynamic,** because it can be and must be revised, adapted, periodically changed, and when the need arises, the LPP accompanies the stages and the different situations of life.

5. ELABORATION OF THE LPP

It is useful to elaborate the LPP in an attitude of listening and of acceptance of the will of God for me, of humble plea in order to receive from his hands this project as his gift, in order to have a fuller life, and thus to help others to have more life.

It is not a matter of inventing something new, but to identify and gather the motions and appeals that God has communicated to me during the life stage that I am living now or I have just finished.

To reach such aim, I do not have to rush, it is a task that needs time. It is necessary an atmosphere of silence and calm, in order to detect the constants of the manifestation/communication of God, his central invitations, because they are more frequent, and being central they cannot be many.

It is of great help to be able to revise the personal notes elaborated during the life stage that I am analysing. I have to identify the constants of the communications/invitations of God, see how they enlighten my life in its central dimensions and I ask myself how I can in a concrete e realistic way, accept and live in my daily life the communication of God. Little by little the elements that will constitute my life project are taking shape.

It is fundamental the confrontation with someone who because of the experience and knowledge he has of myself, can help me to identify the communication of the Lord about me, towards where he wants to lead me.

The LPP becomes alive and dynamic in our daily life through the fidelity to the revision of the day as a means for a continuous

process of personal growth in the relation with God and in the personal relations within and outside of my community and in the mission entrusted to me.

Some gospel texts that can enlighten the LPP: Mt. 7:24-27; Lk 14:25-32.

6. INTRODUCTION TO THE SCHEME FOR THE ELABORATION OF THE LPP

The proposed scheme considers the person as a relational being, whereas the relationship of the individual with himself (1) and with God (2) represent the nucleus. In the relationship with oneself three aspects are specified: physical (1a) psychological (1b) and intellectual (1c).

In close relation with such nucleus the relation with Daniel Comboni (3), our founder, is inserted, Comboni who, in the communion of Saints is a live person with whom I can enter into a relationship. For a Comboni Missionary the relationship with S. Daniel Comboni, is not a marginal element, but crucial for his identity, as it is for all the religious people the relation with the founder of the Institute/Congregation to which they belong.

The stimulus offered by LPP is to overcome a mere intellectual, of ideas and ideals, relationship with the founder for a relationship that makes of S. Daniel Comboni a Father who accompanies me in my journey, who intercedes for me and helps me to be faithful to the vocation received by the Lord.

The relationship with Saint Daniel Comboni characterizes then the relationship with the Comboni Community(4) with the mission/ministry (5) and the material goods (6).

The scheme has an empty space (7) that everybody can use to add another relation/dimension to which he needs to give a particular attention and for this he integrates it in his LPP, for example: the relationship with women, with his own family, with the poor, with some pastoral agent...

For each relationship there are two columns: in the 1st, I am invited to verify, in the context of the considered relation, the central invitation that God addresses to me in this moment in my life, in the 2nd the concrete and realistic commitment I want to take up, in the considered dimension, in answer to the invitation of God to me. As a matter of fact it is this last column that represents the LPP directly, the 1st column that represents the rock on which to build it, as a plan of God for me, for a greater human-spiritual growth and greater apostolic efficacy.

7. LPP SCHEME

| IN THE RELATIONSHIP | THE INVITATION OF GOD TO ME | MY CONCRETE AND REALISTIC COMMITMENT |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. With myself | | |
| a) In my physical dimension | | |
| b) In my psychological dimension | | |
| c) In my intellectual dimension: | | |
| 2. With God | | |
| 3. With St Daniel Comboni | | |
| 4. With the Comboni community | | |
| 5. With Mission | | |
| 6. With material goods | | |
| 7. With... | | |

8. PREPARATION TO THE ELABORATION OF LPP

As a help for the preparation to the LPP we can answer to the following questions:

- 1) What could be the symbol or the image that better expresses the experience I have done (I am doing) during this period of my life?
- 2) What could be the bible text that better describes what I live in this period?

9. STEPS IN THE ELABORATION OF LPP

STEP 1: The starting point for the elaboration of LPP is what I am living, discovering in it the presence and action of God, what are the central communications and invitations that the Lord is giving me, in this moment of my life, towards what He wants to lead me.

Objective: To identify and list the central messages and invitations of God in what I live.

STEP 2: To concretize the invitations of God into the relations that characterize my life (1st column in the scheme of LPP).

Objective: to make explicit the invitations that God sends to me in my relations.

STEP 3: To pass from the invitations given by God to my response, that in order to be efficacious, must be defined in some concrete and realistic commitments (2nd column of the scheme of LPP).

Objective: To formulate my response to the invitation of God.

STEP 4: To ask in prayer during some days the confirmation from God of the LPP I have formulated. To invoke the Spirit to enlighten me suggesting possible changes.

Objective: to put my LPP into the hands of God, expression of our alliance, his and mine.

STEP 5: To verify the LPP that I have formulated, with somebody I trust and who knows me. The spiritual father that accompanies me should be the most suitable person.

Objective: to create a greater objectivity for the efficacy of my LPP, aware that without a confrontation, I can deceive myself.

10. MOMENTS OF REVISION OF LPP

In order to be dynamic the LPP must be reviewed periodically. Particularly opportune moments to review the LPP are:

- the monthly recollection day
 - the yearly spiritual exercises
 - after every meaningful change (community, activity ...)
- and whenever one feels the need.

11. CONCLUSION

The personal project of life as the name says it is a personal initiative, where the individual is the author in its preparation and the protagonist in living it with commitment and consistency. But to talk about it in community and to share it, at least in part, with the confreres would be of great help. In communities where this is possible, it is a good thing to give this community dimension to the PPV.

This tool for our human and spiritual growth can find its “seal” in a slogan, a short phrase, easy to remember, that expresses the deep desire that animates the person accepting and living the life plan in response to the desire that God has for you. The motto, when well developed, gives more power and consistency to our PPV.

Fr. Siro Stocchetti
Rome, 10.10.2011

Rule of Life

COMMUNITY LIFE

36. The Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus gratefully welcome the gift of community life to which the Spirit of the Lord has called them through the original inspiration of the Founder. Their fellowship of life corresponds to the social character of their nature as created by God; it has its beginning and model in the Trinity, and fulfils Christ's prayer "that all may be one". It is a visible sign of the new humanity born of the Spirit that becomes a concrete proclamation of Christ: "May they be perfect in unity so that the world may believe that you have sent me".
37. The Holy Spirit is the bond of fellowship in the Comboni community. He distributes generously his manifold gifts and services to each member. This variety does not harm unity but becomes a source of greater fruitfulness, as it is given for the good of all.
38. The Community makes the commandment of the Lord, "love one another as I have loved you", the basis of its living together.
39. United by a common call and purpose, the missionaries make community life consist in living together in a regular way, seeking together God's will and sharing prayer, property, planning, work and moments of relaxation.
40. Every missionary belongs to a local community. Under no circumstances may a missionary live alone on a permanent basis.
41. Each missionary freely accepts the vocation he received from God and puts his talents and energies and his very life at the service of God and of his brothers and sisters in the community, according to the Constitutions.
42. In the community the dignity, rights and value of each missionary are recognized. Efforts are made to provide everyone with the opportunities and the means needed for the development of his God-given talents and the fulfilment of his vocation according to the Society's purpose.
43. The missionary lives in union with all the communities of the Institute, and is open to cooperation with them.
44. The missionary maintains bonds of affection and gratitude towards his family, through prayer and regular contacts.

Rule of Life

COMMUNITY LIFE

SUPERIOR

- 106.** Ordinary authority is vested in the person of the Superior who is ultimately responsible for any decision. The exercise of authority is based on the principle of subsidiarity, requires corresponsibility, collaboration, respect for each missionary and is manifested especially through dialogue.

THE SUPERIOR'S MINISTRY

- 107.** The Superior animates the community and the individual members in the search for the will of God, in the realization of their missionary consecration and the growth of charity. He exercises authority through the responsibility for decision-making and implementation always in conformity with the purpose of the Society. Moreover he renders his service in arranging the various aspects of community life in harmony and in caring for the well-being of the individual missionary.

107.1 Through tactful determination, sensitivity and initiative, the Superior strives to become a bond of unity by helping each member to overcome his individualistic tendencies and lack of concern for the others, and by encouraging everyone to consider his own talents as a good at the service of all. He respects the competence of those who have been given a specific task.

107.2 The Superior fulfils a role of leadership for the good of the community through directives within his competence, in consultation with the persons involved and, as far as possible, he communicates the reasons for his decisions.

107.3 The Superior ensures that, as far as possible, all have a specific occupation for which they feel personally responsible to him and to the community.

107.4 The Superior has the task of fostering an atmosphere of brotherhood and cooperation with the Local Church.

LOCAL SUPERIOR

- 112.** The Local Superior is appointed by the competent Major Superior with the consent of his Council. He has authority over the members of the community, coordinates and animates it in a spirit of service.