

GUIDED BY THE MISSION AND VISION OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL
DIRECTOR'S REPORT TO THE 2014 VDEI USA DISTRICT ASSEMBLY

The first canonical Assembly of Affairs and Elections of the newly erected United States District will convene on August 4, 2014. The Assistant Director General, Fr. Jean-Paul Chiasson, will convene the Assembly and Brother Loughlan Sofield will be the facilitator. Mark Dilone will be the secretary for the Assembly.

After consulting with the USA District Council for their review and input, I present the following report to the Assembly delegates, official observers and the membership at large:

“Guided by the Mission and Vision of the Second Vatican Council” is the theme of the first USA District Assembly. All Assembly delegates and observers have read and reflected on Ecclesial Movements and Communities by Brendan Leahy. The team lessons for 2013-2014 have been based on the Council documents, Leahy’s text, and Voluntas spirituality. The entire District has been preparing for the Assembly by their reflection and prayer with these documents. These texts place the deliberations of the Assembly in the larger context of the Church and the world.

Fr. Parent lived in Rome during the Second Vatican Council and was clearly influenced by its vision for the Church and the world. He met Pope John XXIII on several occasions and found in him a kindred spirit. Their vision of the world is one of optimism in the boundless unfolding grace of God as we journey back to the Father.

We are blessed that we gather as a District during the first year anniversary of the election of Pope Francis. He embodies in so many ways the spirit of Saint Pope John XXIII and Fr. Parent. In fact, when he was asked what name he would take if here were elected Pope in 2004, he responded he would have taken the name of Pope John XXIV. Pope Francis writes, “We haven’t even begun to understand and appreciate the vision of the Council. “ He tells us: “Do not be afraid of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will disturb us, calling us to new places.” Given this reality, it was providential that in 2013 we chose the theme “Guided by Mission and Vision of the Second Vatican Council” for the 2014 Assembly.

The Church has existed for two millennia. This is a sobering reality when we place the fifty-year anniversary of the Council within that context. Indeed, we are just beginning! More sobering is that secular institutes have been in existence only since 1947 and the Voluntas Dei Institute since 1958. We are a new reality within the evolving reality of the Church. As we discuss the proposals at the Assembly, we open our hearts to where the Holy Spirit is leading is as we move into the future as a relatively new ecclesial reality.

We begin by looking back to where we have been for the past four years. However, that is only the starting point. The main purpose of our gathering is to look ahead, to build on the last four years and discern where God is calling us to go for the next four years.

As we look back, let us give thanks; As we move forward, let us let go of fear and courageously embrace God's grace as we enter into prayerful discernment during the Assembly. We call upon the spirits of all who have gone before us, especially Fr. Parent, to intercede for us and to guide us along the way.

This report is divided into four segments:

1. Let us Give Thanks
2. A Snapshot of the USA District
3. The Journey-2010-2014
4. The Future isn't what it used to be: Questions and Challenges

I. LET US GIVE THANKS

I want to acknowledge that God who is the Giver of all good gifts blessed us during these past four years. We begin by acknowledging, "All is Grace."
The same God who has guided us these past years will guide in the years ahead so that *Voluntas Dei* can be all that God wants us to be.

The growth and development of the District during these four years has been due in no small measure to the extraordinary council that we elected in 2010. It has been an absolute pleasure and joy to work with Julian, Greg, Carol and Joel, and Jim. We have met regularly over the past four years, using all of the latest technologies to facilitate regular communication and to build a council that operates on the principle of collegiality. For the first time the deliberations of the council have been shared in appropriate ways in "Council Notes" that have been a new feature in "Togetherness" over the past four years. The dates of council meetings were announced in "Togetherness" and members were invited to present agenda items.

The work of the council has not just been discussing and voting on issues but rather has been one in which each member has rolled up his or her sleeves and have become involved in the work of the District. To cite a few examples of the active involvement of our council:

- Leading the formation program for the District
- Membership on the formation team
- Leading and coordinating the St. Isidore team
- Serving as a team facilitator
- Participating in writing the monthly team reflections
- Travelling to different parts of the country for Voluntas meetings or gatherings.
- Coordinating all of our written documents into digital files
- Travelling to Ethiopia
- Coordinating the plenary gatherings
- Overseeing communication to the District
- Serving as sector facilitator and vocation directors
- Participating in an annual Day of Recollection for the council
- Leading the annual retreat
- Updating the District Website, adding the USCSI produced videos, and participating in the renewal and updating of the Institute website.

There are two important milestones that the Council facilitated and brought to completion during their term of Office----and these are two events for which we give thanks to God:

- The United States was erected as District in the Voluntas Dei Institute on March 8, 2013. We are the fourth country in the Institute to be given this distinction.
- The Director General and his Council asked that Ethiopia become a Sector of the United States District on August 9, 2013

We also give thanks for those who have participated in particular ways in the life of the District during the past four years.

- Deacon Paul Lang and the finance committee who coordinated all of our finances, insurance, and legal needs
- Eileen and Mary Theys who coordinated communication and “Togetherness”
- Bill and Betty Reuter who coordinated logistics and hospitality for Plenary Gatherings and Congresses
- Linda Christopher who coordinated registration at the Norbertine Abbey
- Fr. Anthony DiPalma who Created and coordinates our Safe Environment Program
- Jim Halley, John Szamreta, and Bill Konicki who served as Sector Facilitators
- Greg Kremer who led our formation program together with Rory Murphy, George Hazler, Jamie Bono, and Julian Gonzalez
- All who participated and took active roles on the committees of the District.

- John Anderson and the liturgy committee for facilitating and preparing beautiful prayer and inspiring liturgy for our gatherings.
- Emmanuel Bologna, who has been present at all of our national gatherings, and has facilitated our liturgical worship and music.

We remember with gratitude and affection our members who have gone back home to God during these past four years:

- Fr. Malachy Higgiston
- Eleanor Surowiec
- Fr. Thomas Furlong

We thank God for their vocations to Voluntas Dei and we ask them to intercede for us during our Assembly.

II. A SNAPSHOT OF THE USA DISTRICT

The demographics of our members and teams reflect the health and reality of who we are. In addition to the human demographics, a full financial report will be presented at both the Assembly and the Congress.

The following is a list of our teams and the breakdown of its members.

(1) BAY STATE TEAM (Worcester Mass)

Facilitator: Fr. Bill Konicki
Stability: 2
Committed: 2 couples
Probation: 1 couple
Observer: 2

(2) RESERVOIR OF GRACE (Westchester, New York and Southern Connecticut)

Facilitator: Fr. Paul Tolve
Stability: 2
Religious order transfer: 1
Committed; 1 couple

(3) CENTRAL PARK TEAM (New York City)

Facilitator: Fr. Anthony Ciorra
Stability: 1
Vowed: 1
Aspirancy (priesthood candidate): 1
Probation (priesthood candidate): 1
Affiliates: 2
Transfer from Religious order: 1
Observers: 2 couples
 2 priests
 1 diocesan seminarian

(4) NEW YORK HARBOR (Queens, New York)

Facilitator: Fr. Jim Musumeci
Stability: 1
Religious order Transfer: 1
Observer: 1

(6) JAMAICA BAY (Queens, New York)

Facilitator: Fr. Arthur Candreva

Stability: 2

(7) LATINO TEAM OF BROOKLYN (Brooklyn, New York)

Facilitator: Fr. Andrew Sioleti

Stability: 1

Transfers from Religious Order: 2

Observers: 15

(8) JERSEY LAKES (Newton, New Jersey)

Facilitator: Eileen and Marty Theys

Stability: 2 couples

2 priests

Vowed: 1

Observers: 2

(9) JERSEY SHORE (Southern New Jersey)

Facilitator: Fr. John Campoli

Stability: 1 priest

1 couple

Committed: 1 couple

Affiliates: 4

(10) HIGHLAND REACH (Northern Jersey Shore)

Facilitator: Paul and Eileen Lang

Stability: 2

Transfer from Religious Order: 1

Committed: 2 couples

1 widow

Affiliates: 2

(11) ST ISIDORE (Cyber Team)

Facilitator: Greg Kremer

Stability: 2

Vowed: 2

Probation: 1

Aspirancy: 1

Affiliate: 1

(12) GREAT LAKES (Michigan)

Facilitator: Fr. George Hazler

Stability: 1

Committed: 1 couple

(13) GOLD COAST TEAM (Florida)

Facilitator: Fr. Julian Gonzalez

Stability: 2

Vowed: 1

(14) LONG BEACH (California)

Facilitator: Fr. Jim Halley

Stability: 1 priest

Aspirancy: 1 priest

Transfer Religious Order:1

(15) MOUNTAIN SPRINGS (Colorado)

Facilitator: Fr. Timothy Corbley

Stability: 1

Commitment: 1 couple

Affiliates: 4

(16) CITY OF LAKES (St Paul-Minneapolis)

Facilitator: Fr. James Burns

Vowed: 1

Probation: 1

Observers: 2

(17) MORGAN RUN

Facilitator: Fr. Gerard Steffner

Stability: 1

Aspirancy: 1

(18) MOORINGS BY THE SEA (Trinidad)

Facilitators: Mary and Skip Buckman

Stability: 1 couple

Commitment: 2 couples

Probation: 1 couple

(19) NORTH RHINE WESTPHALIA (Germany)

Facilitator: Fr. Christian Matuschek

Vowed: 1

Probation: 1

Observers: 1 couple

(20) ETHIOPIA SECTOR

Stability: 1 couple

Probation: 34

Aspirancy : 4

Seminarians: 2

Affiliates: 2

Candidates: 23

III. THE JOURNEY-2010-2014

The 2010 Assembly of the USA “District in Formation” voted on strategic goals that were given to the newly elected council to implement. These were divided into three areas., Spirituality, Vocations and Finances. The goals were voted on and recommendations were given to the council on how the goals might be implemented, recognizing that the strategic plan would be a living document impacted by circumstances in the church, the Institute and the world.

SPRITUALITY

S 1: “That the team encourage each individual to live the facets of the Voluntas Dei Commitment”

S2: “That team facilitators gather to share best practices so that there may be new and creative ways of conducting and animating team meetings

S3: “That in-service training be provided to formation leaders in the content and skills required for the education and formation of the candidates in each step of formation.

The following are actions taken by the council

- The formation team designed a new format for team lessons and broadened the base of those writing the lessons
- Several members were encouraged to take courses, programs and workshops to help prepare them to become leaders in formation. These members had several telephone conference meetings to begin to create a new vision for formation.
- There were two occasions when team facilitators met in Paoli to discuss best practices.
- The formation team designed a four year plan with themes for each year
- The formation structure was changed to incorporate the geographical diversity in the District. There was a strong movement towards more responsibility being given to the teams rather than break out groups at national gatherings.
- We experimented with the division of the District into three sectors, Annunciation, Visitation and Assumption. Sector facilitators were appointed
- We experimented with recollection days within sectors as a way of recruiting new members and also providing a venue where families who could not come for a weekend might be able to come for a one-day experience.
- We created a new website that is inviting and also provides a venue where there could be future possibility of members interacting (e.g., night prayer)

- All in formation are required to attend the annual retreat, as well as those moving to next steps. All members have been encouraged to attend. Attendance has improved over the past few years.
- Formation Tam has fine-tuned its discernment skills

VOCATIONS

The following goals were accepted:

V2 (a) The primary vocation effort of each member of Voluntas Dei Institute USA is to live out his/her vocation. In addition, it is recommended that our vocation efforts reflect ethnic, economic, and age diversity, with a special emphasis on recruiting younger members

V2 (b) The structure, schedule, location and expectations for the national gathering should be reworked so as to be more responsive to the needs of married couples, especially those with children; for the economically challenged; and reflecting cultural diversity

V (3) It is recommended that Voluntas Dei Institute USA initiate dialogue with the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate in the USA

The following actions were taken during the past four years:

- Three sectors were established, Annunciation (East), Visitation (West), and Assumption (St. Isidore and Diaspora)
- Experimentation with different meeting locations: Connecticut, Newark, etc.
- Experimented with two sector gatherings, East and West
- Experimented with a Plenary Gathering format in March
- Experimented with a Saturday/Sunday format for March to see if more couples would be able to come
- A Latino team was established in Brooklyn with about 15 candidates
- Younger members: there are now six younger candidates for the priesthood
- OMMI member have been invited to our gatherings 2013-2014
- Three new teams have been established
 1. Highland Reach-Facilitator: Paul Lang
 2. Reservoir of Grace-Facilitator: Paul Tolve
 3. Hispanic Team-Facilitator: Andrew Sioleti

FINANCES

The following strategic goals were established:

F1-That there be a finance committee for Voluntas Dei Institute USA District

F2-That the council members will develop a living strategic plan that will be used to focus planning and resource expenditures

F3-The finance committee is to develop a policy concerning insurance and indemnity issues and submit these recommendations to the District Council for their consideration

The following actions were taken

- A finance committee was established
- Tax exemption status was given to the USA District
- The USA District is legally and canonically established in the Archdiocese of New York
- Insurance policies have been purchased
- A Safe Environment program/policies ad Review Board have been established
- Regular financial reports are given at the annual congress
- Letters have been sent about financial obligations
- An investment portfolio was set up
- The legal issue of priests from other jurisdictions have been finalized

IV. THE FUTURE ISN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE

CHALLENGES AND QUESTIONS

The final section of this report is about the challenges that face us and questions that I present to our membership

1. The Recruitment of New Members

We need to continue to recruit younger members, members of minority groups, and married couples. As we look to the future, our overall membership is aging and primarily anglo. As compared to other Voluntas Dei Districts, we have more transfer diocesan priests and religious order priests. These are the vocations God has sent us---and we receive them with gratitude. At the same time, as we look to the future, we need to seriously consider the shifting demographics (The USA Church is becoming increasingly Hispanic) and the Anglo population is aging.

Questions for our consideration:

- A. What are the ways we need to change so younger members and minority groups would feel more comfortable being with us?
- B. What can we do as individuals and as teams to recruit more members?
- C. How might the application process and expectations respond to the particular needs of young parents with dependent children?

2. Participation of Members

Many of our members participate in the tasks that need to be done in the District---that is the glass half full. There are other members who do not share in the tasks that need to be accomplished---that is the glass half empty

Questions for our consideration:

- A. What are the ways that your team might become more actively involved in the District?
- B. What are the ways that you individually can involve yourself more in the tasks that need to be accomplished?

3. The Sector System

The experiment of three sectors, Annunciation, Visitation, and Assumption needs to be examined. Sectors as outlined in the Constitutions have not worked well in the USA. The reality of the United States is that approximately 75% (or more) of our membership resides on the East coast.

It is a challenge to have one Congress, one Plenary Gathering, and one Formation Team. To attempt to replicate these structures throughout the country would appear to be a drain on our resources (people, time, and money).

Ethiopia is an example of an actual sector that makes sense. It is large enough to engage its members in the tasks of formation, gatherings, a common project, and vocation recruitment.

Questions for our consideration:

- A. Would it make more sense to divide the East coast into two sectors?
- B. Do you have any suggestions how we might cluster the teams that are not on the East coast and teams in other countries?

4. Gatherings

It is expected that all members attend the annual Congress. We have been fairly successful in achieving that goal. The pooling of resources to offer one Plenary Gathering in March proved to be successful in Connecticut in 2013 and in Newark in 2014. The Recollection days held in the Annunciation Sector in November 2013 were well attended and successful.

Questions for our consideration

- A. The finances for some to come to the August Congress can be difficult. We have provided financial assistance when asked by individuals. Can we develop a financial contribution system from the overall membership that would subsidize members coming from a geographical distance or those who cannot afford the Congress fees?
- B. Can we look to structures such as the Recollection Day, one-day events in different areas that are easier to coordinate and is more financially feasible allowing all members the opportunity to participate.

5. The Committee Structure

The committees have been a great help in accomplishing the many tasks that are needed in the District. However, not all committees are functioning as smoothly and consistently as others. Is it time to evaluate and reorganize the committee structure?

Questions for our consideration

- A. How active have you been on the committees?
- B. What are your thoughts for restructuring our committees?

6. The Ethiopian Sector

The Director General and his council asked the USA to accept Ethiopia as a Sector. Joel Livingston, Andrew Sioleti and I travelled to Ethiopia in January 2014 to visit the members there and to report back to the USA. This report was given at the March Plenary Gathering and additional information will be shared at the August Assembly and Congress. Mr. and Mrs. Terfa, the leaders from Ethiopia will be with us in August and will be received into stability with our members at the Congress. They will report on the progress in Ethiopia since the January visit.

The visitation to Ethiopia was a moving experience. We found a vibrant Voluntas community with a well functioning council and a ministry to the elderly, homeless and HIV infected. The role of the USA District is to offer fraternal support and to serve as consultants/advisors to the Sector. Although the District does not have financial responsibility for the Ethiopia Sector, we are making a concerted effort to obtain funding for the education of seminarians and the ministry to the poor and homeless through grants/foundations, preaching through the Propagation of the Faith, and searching for some sponsoring parishes and donors.

As explained at the March Gathering, Fr. John O'Neill will coordinate the preaching assignments and sponsoring parishes and Jan Dugan will coordinate the preaching schedule for the Propagation of the Faith. Fr. Christian Matuschek will coordinate grant foundations in Germany

Questions for our consideration

- A. In what ways does the Ethiopian sector challenge us to grow as a District?
- B. In what ways can you as an individual and your team get involved with this project?

7. Financial Support

Although the financial health of the District is good, only 33 members made contributions in 2013-2014. All vowed are expected to give 7-10% of their net income and committed members are expected to give 2%. All affiliates, aspirants and probationers are asked to contribute what they can.

Questions for our consideration

- A. In addition to the expected financial contributions, all members are expected to take on their personal project of poverty. Give examples of what these projects might be?
- B. Some members may not be able to contribute financially. What are some of the other ways members might contribute?

8. Formation

The team is the essential place for formation in the Institute. Most teams have used the newly crafted team lessons and report positively about their experience. We have also moved away from formation groups at national gatherings and placed formation back at the team level. Several members have also been asked to take courses, programs, and workshops to prepare for formation work in the District.

Questions for your consideration

- A. What has been your experience of the team lessons?
- B. What has been your experience of formation taking place on the team level?