

## **BASIC DOCUMENT**

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## **FOREWORD**

Fifteen years after the birth of the C.O.M.I. Association, as the historical, political and social landscape has changed, both nationally and internationally, the Members' Assembly has found the need to draw up a document outlining the values that individual members feel are their own as the result of the life experience gained and shared over the years.

These values, also through this document, are re-proposed to the members themselves and presented as a choice of life and commitment to those who are aware that they belong to a single family: that of man.

The document consists of the following points:

a historical analysis of the origin and basic motivations that generated and sustained the Association;

the indication of the choice of field and its particular characteristics.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The Lay Association C.O.M.I. was established by notarial deed on 1/2/1973. It became a member of the F.O.C.S.I.V. (Federation of Christian Organisations of International Voluntary Service) and was granted 'recognition of eligibility' by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1974.

Born from the missionary experience of the institute of the Oblate Missionary Cooperators of the Immaculate  
- whose acronym it retains in its name - has opened up, more than a year after its establishment, to the participation of other lay people from outside the Institute.

Over the next three years, participation in the life of the F.O.C.S.I.V. was highly intensified, a constant path of training was started, and the first information activities were undertaken, while for the training of volunteers, the collaboration of the youth centre in Marino (RM) of the Oblate missionaries of Mary Immaculate was utilised.

In 1978, the new Board of Directors was first concerned with drawing up an internal regulation, then with dividing the various activities into different sectors and entrusting them individually to a particular councillor, and finally with reorganising the general administration. From year to year, the contents of each sector were then deepened, with particular attention to that of training, while at the same time all the activities of the Association were continued and improved; noteworthy was the birth of the periodical 'Uomini Nuovi'.

This second, problem-filled period highlighted how commitment to volunteering is a calling, a life choice.

## **ROOTS**

The birth of the Association from the institute of the C.O.M.I.(1) meant that certain aspects of their spirituality, which stemmed from the charism of Blessed Eugene de Mazenod,(2) were, from the very beginning, the focus of the first adherents.

The Association then, also assisted by an ecclesiastical assistant, chosen from among the Oblates, opened itself up to the encounter with the local Church and, in its albeit short history, has seen the following elements of Oblate spirituality come to the fore:

recognising and accepting Jesus Christ, Saviour of all, as the origin, the foundation of the new humanity;

looking at Mary as the creature who first, through a manifesto called the 'Magnificat', bore witness to a newness of life, realised in her and proposed to humanity that would welcome her;

openness to universal brotherhood and the preferential choice of the poorest - both of God and of earthly goods - taking up the motto of Blessed Eugene 'He sent me to evangelise the poor';

the constant building of a strong community bond between members, which becomes a welcoming environment for young people who come even if only to ask for information. The opening of the first project in Senegal in 1981 and the requests for collaboration from numerous interreligious groups opened the COMI to confrontation and collaboration with those who do not share the same ideal: 'the missionary attitude of the Church ... disposes ... to listen to everyone and to confront even those who do not belong ... to them. Listening and confrontation in order to know and to give, but also to receive so as to open oneself ever more fully to the gift of communion and to offer those answers of salvation which the world awaits". (C.C. n.62).

What has already been said suggests that the Association has acquired an identity that does not refer vaguely to Christian values, but seeks to actualise them through its members.

The identity of the association is thus identifiable in the purposes for which it was established and, moreover, in the ways of participation that these values require:

a journey of faith in the light of the Word of God;

an experience of true fraternity fuelled by a growing spirit of communion;

a gratuitous and disinterested service, an expression of the gift of oneself to the poorest brothers and sisters and the awareness that we are all children of the same Father.

## **BASIC MOTIVATIONS**

Aware that our vocation as lay people is to "seek the Kingdom of God by dealing with temporal things and ordering them according to God" (L.G. n. 31 ) and remembering that the Christian vocation "is by its very nature also a vocation to the apostolate" (A.A. n. 2), we place in this context the yearning for an ideal of universal brotherhood that finds its response and fulfilment in love for mankind.

This love is a service for the benefit of humanity; without any interest "freely you have received, freely give" (Mt 10:8); it is "the sign and expression of evangelical charity, which is a free and disinterested gift of oneself to one's neighbour, especially to the poorest and neediest" (Holy Father's address to the F.O.C.S.I.V. - 31 January 1981).

It is love channelled above all, towards those defrauded by society, the exploited, the oppressed, the handicapped, the marginalised. It is an anticipation, sign and manifestation of the liberation brought about by the Word of God: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are healed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the good news is proclaimed to the poor" (Ref. Is. 35:5-6; 61:1; Lk. 4:18).

Animated by the love of Jesus, we listen to the cry of those who suffer and recognise a situation of injustice that demands our commitment to the poor and marginalised. A commitment that does not end in accusations, claims and sterile protests, but:

is born from the assumption of one's responsibilities;

it grows in the consistency between ideals and

concrete choices; it lives in constructive solidarity

and sharing.

The purpose of this commitment is directed towards man, who is its central element and immediate end, agent and beneficiary, and towards God and His Kingdom as its ultimate goal.

## **THE PRIORITY CHOICE OF DEVELOPMENT**

The Association, ever more aware "of its own dignity and the dignity of every human being" (S.r.s. 26), aware that the role of the laity within human and ecclesial reality is to promote and liberate man from conditions of frustration and slavery through science, technology, economics, culture, the arts, social communication, etc. (E.N. 70); knowing that "the obligation to commit oneself to the development of peoples ... is an imperative for each and everyone" (E.N.32) to be realised:

- with personal style,
- with the appropriate use of goods, originally intended for all men (S.r.s. 9)
- with personal participation of strength and time;

wants to work for the development of the human family and, in line with the special attention it gives to the poorest, it wants to:

- promote the self-development of the neediest peoples, understood as awareness and realisation of their possibilities to manage their own development autonomously;
- cooperate with those who seek to take their destiny into their own hands without imposing external models, but respecting the local culture in an attitude of mutual exchange.

The fruits of such an exchange contribute to the creation of a new culture attentive to development issues and education for globalisation.

Evaluating among the positive signs of contemporary reality "the growing awareness of the interdependence of men and nationsMen and women, in various parts of the world feel injustices and violations of human rights as their own" (H.R.S. 38) and recognising that "the goods of creation are meant for all" (H.R.S. 39), the Association is committed to providing responses of solidarity that involve the whole man in his completeness and wholeness and express human brotherhood.

The Association maintains that solidarity cannot have the incisiveness and fruit that is hoped for in the social field if it is only marked by a humanitarian spirit, but is certain that it must go further, giving the term solidarity all the depth and strength of lived evangelical love.

## **THE CHARACTERISTICS**

Looking to the Gospel as 'the Word' capable of renewing this humanity of ours from the ground up, the Association wants to live out its roots, motivations and choices with the following characteristics:

### **Life choice**

Volunteering is not a passing 'different' moment in which one is caught up in youthful infatuation, but a life choice commensurate with one's talents, one's vocation, one's availability. It presents itself as a transformation, as a new life of our being that begins to address every daily fact and in particular every social problem in a precise dimension.

It is therefore not so much a matter of choosing to respond to situations as of an inner predisposition that makes concrete acts take place here in Italy as in Third World countries or anywhere else where man cannot fully live his dignity. In this logic of freedom of spirit, we can always experience new perspectives of commitment.

Therefore, the Association proposes:

voluntary service in the Third World, which remains the priority choice;

internal volunteering, in Italy, and in collaboration with other organisations;

the volunteer work within the association that makes its existence possible, the achievement of common goals, and the support of volunteers in action.

### ***Gratuity***

Against the selfishness that creates 'structures of sin' (S.r.s. 36) and the excessive thirst for money and power, the Association proposes service to others in a spirit of gratuitousness.

Gratuity, this way of relating to others in a benevolent manner that does not seek compensation of any kind, universally recognised as a characteristic of voluntary organisations, even predates the very choice to volunteer.

As already mentioned in the chapter "The Characteristics", gratuitousness is inherent in the very gift of life: "Freely you have received, freely give", (Mt 10:8). In fact, the very act of origin, creation, is an act of pure love, "God created man in his own image..." (Gen.1.27). (Gen.1.27) an act of gratuitousness and communication of one's life.

The Association therefore proposes gratuitousness and, through it, intends to bring man, especially those in need, back to the centre of public attention and social intervention. Indeed, gratuitousness, made service, becomes a common project.

Finally, the Association experiences how gratuitousness, by its very nature, generates a mutual enrichment resulting from self-offering and the interchange of values.

### *Sharing*

An attitude of profound openness is the basis of the value of sharing, since it requires first of all an awareness of the world around us and the problems that plague it.

Carrying one another's burdens, rejoicing with those in joy and weeping with those in weeping, this is sharing; the expression and embodiment of a communion that does not arise from mere solidarity with one another, but transcends it by taking root in Trinitarian love.

Sharing, or 'taking charge of the other', is an expression of deep respect and participation in an experience that from personal becomes communal.

This attitude of mind also gives rise to the need to act together; in respect for individuality, in dialogue and mutual understanding it is then possible to work, in sharing, on projects for change that give hope, that are answers to the problems that beset humanity.

### *Community*

"Sharing the faith and a serious Christian commitment often brings some people together in homogeneous groups, either because of personal affinities or because of particular charisms or specific tasks of evangelisation or human promotion. Thus a little everywhere many small communities flourish in the Church " (C.C. 45).

The Association has lived and continues to live the experience described by the bishops and is aware that every community form 'is born from communion' and 'is constituted on the basis of visible and stable relationships that bind believers together in the common profession of faith' (C.C. 15).

It is indispensable, therefore, to build communities, to give substance to these stable bonds and, above all, to acquire a mentality of communion and then extrinsicate it in faith and charity.

To pursue unity, however, charity is indispensable, which "finds its first expression in the exchangeable gift of prayer" and "is exalted ... in the mutual acceptance of all persons and of the plurality of experiences when these are an authentic and mutually complementary expression of the Holy Spirit" (C.C. 62).

Faith, a personal gift, commits to communication:

" ... Living by faith unceasingly nourishes and impels one to communicate to those who do not yet possess it. Faith, in other words, opens up the circuit of communion, introduces us into its grace, into its life, and calls us to expand and give it" (C.C. 59).

Creating a mindset of communion commits us to living certain human values such as the attitude of thinking and working together on common projects, sharing commitments, and even improving communication, respect and mutual esteem.

The Bishops tell us that "preliminary to any realisation of community is first of all the capacity to listen" (C.C. 64), which the Association makes its own in a general way insofar as it is aware that "in listening, interpersonal relations therefore become acceptance and donation in the reciprocal charity that is expressed in fraternal correction, in the spirit of service, in forgiveness" (C.C. 64), and also in a specific way because it has always been a distinguishing feature of COMI to have welcomed deeply all the people who have approached the experience of volunteering.

Welcoming in fact is not limited to simply listening, to respect for the other, to the awareness that the other is for us as a gift, but immediately places him in the family environment of the Association where he loses his extraneousness to the environment and recognises himself as belonging to the human family, in the expression of its best values, enhances his talents and immediately fits in, thus expressing the gift of self.

The community has as its only law and norm of life the new commandment of Jesus 'love one another as I have loved you'. This is also the indispensable condition for it to be able to render an authentic service to today's world thirsting for justice, freedom and truth.

### *Universality*

The Association intends to live and promote universal solidarity 'as an indispensable condition, autonomous and free willingness ... to accept the sacrifices necessary for the good of the world community' (S.r.s. 45) 'Collaboration in the development of the whole man and of every man, in fact, is a duty of all towards all and must, at the same time, be common to the four parts of the world: East and West, North and South ... to the different 'worlds'.

If, on the contrary, one seeks to realise it in only one part, or in only one world, it is done at the expense of others; and where it begins, precisely because others are ignored, it becomes hypertrophied and perverted' (S.r.s. 32).

The Association is aware that our common sonship of God, brotherhood in Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit are the fundamental principles of belonging to one family and of universal brotherly and active solidarity.

## **TRAINING**

The Association is aware that in order to realise the above - spirituality, ideals, characteristics - an adequate human and Christian formation is required.

This training, which is a vital and indispensable element both for departing volunteers and for all those who wish to commit themselves as cadres of the Association, is not only aimed at the technical-professional aspect, but rather encompasses everything that can help with human maturation and the fulfilment of specific roles.

Candidate volunteers, in particular, have the right to know in depth the scope of what they intend to undertake, in order to make a conscious and responsible choice accordingly. They must be informed about everything that both voluntary work in general and voluntary work of Christian inspiration, especially that of the COMI, entail, and at the same time they must be helped to get to know themselves better and better, with regard to their own aptitudes, abilities and motivations in relation to the choice they have made. They must follow a special path in order to gradually acquire those human and spiritual values and attitudes that are indispensable for achieving, in fraternity, friendship and communion of faith and ideals, with the other volunteers, the aims that COMI sets itself. In particular, they must bear in mind the responsibilities they have because wherever they serve, the COMI will be represented by them and therefore judged on the basis of their actions.

applicable, or, in the case of external parties, the measures deemed necessary and/or appropriate to prevent the recurrence of the established infringement.

### **Acceptance and Visibility of the Code of Ethics**

This Code of Ethics must be communicated to all persons interacting with the COMI and read, shared and signed by them for acknowledgement and adherence.