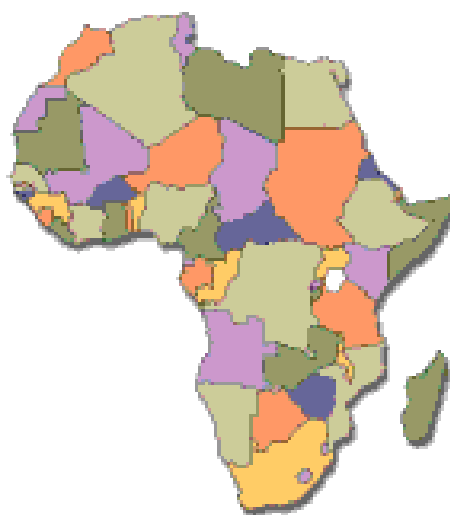


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**THE *HOLY FAMILY* ON MISSION
IN AFRICA TODAY**



Holy Family Continental Meeting

South Africa, 14 - 25 January 2003

PART ONE

Opening Ritual
3

Setting the scene
4 - 5

Aspects of Inculturation
6 - 8

Inculturation and
Consecrated Life
9 - 10

Healing Ministry in the
African context
10 - 14

Sustainability and
Interdependence
15 - 17

Leadership Issues
17

PART TWO

Animation by
General Leadership
Team
18 - 20

DECLARATION
21

Participants
22



Introduction

The *Echoes* of the EGC of January 2001, p. 24, gives the background to the Continental Meetings that bring together the entire leadership teams of the different Provinces and Delegations of a continent. The idea was proposed by the outgoing General Leadership Team to the 1999 General Chapter which endorsed it. The purpose is to broaden the participation in leadership by involving the whole team in the discussions and reflections and enable all to share some common animation.

Each continent was invited to choose a theme and place for its meeting and take charge of the organisation. The first part of the meeting would be concerned with the particular issues of the continent while the second part was to be facilitated by the General Leadership Team.

We know the circumstances that prevented the immediate implementation of the proposal. With the African meeting the plan is now underway.

The place

South Africa was the host country for the meeting of the four Leadership Teams of Africa and the two representatives of the communities of Rwanda and Uganda. The venue was *La Verna*, a Conference and



View of chapel with kitchen/dining block in background

Retreat Centre belonging to the Franciscans, about an hour's drive to the south of Johannesburg. It is an ideal spot for such a gathering, situated as it is among the trees on the Vaal river,

though not entirely isolated from the noise of the traffic flow over the nearby bridge.

Temperatures varied from 17° in the morning to 34° in the evening so the swimming pool was a particular boon. Occasional thunderstorms with brilliant flashes of lightening, deafening thunder and torrential rain also came to refresh the earth and the people, mainly during the night or early morning.

The participants, most of whom had already been in Johannesburg for a couple of days, gathered at La Verna in the afternoon of 14 January.

Opening Ritual

After the evening meal the opening ritual was celebrated. The prayer, begun in the evening and continued the following morning, was rooted in the African context and incorporated traditional symbols and values.

In the meeting hall, all stood to invoke the Holy Spirit.

The following prayer describes the purpose of the meeting and expresses the deep hopes and desires of all for a fruitful outcome:

Lord God, Father and Mother of our ancestors and Father and Mother of us all, it has always been your wish and plan to gather us together in unity and in love. Here we are as the children of your own family. We have come together from the four winds of the earth, walking in the footsteps of your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Ancestor, our Healer, our Leader, our Initiation Master.

Remembering Ancestral Leaders

Our focus point is this vast land of Africa saved by the blood of the lamb and the blood of martyrs and the serious commitment of all missionaries of your church, as well as the wise leaders of all colours and of all ages. At the beginning of our African Continental Meeting we call to memory the names of the great women and men who preceded us in the lineage of Leadership in this land.

At this moment, a representative of each country named their predecessors in the mission of leadership, with Margaret recalling the names of Joy and Josephine Mendis.

Candles were lit in their memory.

The prayer continued:

We ask for an increase of faith in the power you give to women and men who put their trust in you. Give us the courage to look deeply into



the situations of our different countries with a view to finding ways and means of walking more faithfully according to your plan for a better way of life for all in this land of Africa.

Finally, Pierre Bienvenu Noailles, our great ancestor, was called to be among us.

Then, everyone was invited to go out into the night and, like Abraham, to look up at the stars and think of our ancestors and those who would succeed us. Drums and African chants accompanied the participants.

The prayer said on the following morning summed up the aspirations of the whole group:

Lord God of our Ancestors and God of us all! We have asked for your strength and power as we begin our first African Continental Meeting. We are filled with the joy of your spirit because we know for sure that you have given us far more than we ask for. We thank you for this moment of prayer and togetherness with you at the heart of our community assembled here. May we be faithful to your graces and to the mission you confide to us that we be Family like you God-Communion, and take part in your wonderful deeds as you renew our world more and more with your love.

Give us new eyes to see your powerful presence in all our cultures in order to move forward with new hope and courage. You who live, nurture and maintain life forever and ever. Amen.

Margaret's Opening Words

Addressing the assembly Margaret called the event "a special moment in the life of the Institute and the *Holy Family* in Africa". She emphasised the fact, however, that it was not merely an African event but an Institute event and referred to the great interest it was arousing throughout the *Holy Family* world. There was evidence of this in the many messages with assurance of prayer and support received.

She went on to say: "We are invited to live this moment with the eyes and hearts of faith. With Jesus we seek wisdom and we listen to the prompting of the Spirit, so as to accept the challenges that Africa presents and to discover the presence of God's goodness especially at this time when we experience great socio-cultural changes, many different forms

of suffering, conflicts and moments of light and dark."

The present situation in Africa, Margaret said, is an opportunity and a call to live our mission ever more authentically in a way that responds to the needs around us. As *Holy Family* leaders the participants will do this if they are rooted in our charism, live for the mission, are strong in faith, joyful in hope and fruitful in love.

She appealed for openness to transformation so that the time together would "lead us forward in the living of our mission in Africa".

Referring to the "passion for the reign of God" mentioned in the Congress Declaration, Margaret concluded in these words: "May that passion for the Reign of God be visible and

Purposes of the meeting

They were posted for all to see and remember during the week.

- ◆ To come to some shared understanding of what it means for *Holy Family* to be on mission in Africa today.
- ◆ To learn from *Holy Family* experience so far in the different African contexts and benefit from the diversity.
- ◆ To get to know one another for mutual support and continued *Holy Family* presence/common mission for the people of Africa.

tangible among us as we live these days together. May we 'go forward' together in communion with one another, with the people of Africa and with our God."

Story-telling



In African cultures, story telling serves for both entertainment and education. Both these elements were evident on Thursday 16 January when the representatives of each country told their stories. The narratives gave a vivid picture of each place and were told with illustrations and mime.

In addition to preparing their presentations, each country had also responded to questions designed to serve as a backdrop to the reflections and discussions during the days to come.

What are the most significant African Values?

All the answers included the following in one form or another:

- ◆ Respect, (including self-respect, respect for life and property).
- ◆ Sense of the sacred
- ◆ Hospitality and welcome
- ◆ Sense of sharing
- ◆ Importance of family
- ◆ Sense of reconciliation
- ◆ Joyfulness and cheerfulness
- ◆ Sense of endurance, mentioned by those countries that are suffering most (Rwanda and DRC)
- ◆ UBUNTU (People become people through other people), the term much used in South Africa today.

What are the most pressing challenges in African society?

The answers showed a deep desire to return to the traditional values of the continent, to UBUNTU

- ◆ Proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ
- ◆ The integral development of the whole person, with particular attention to women
- ◆ Youth formation
- ◆ Inculturation of Religious Life
- ◆ Rediscovery of cultural values that are worth promoting
- ◆ Promotion of peace and justice
- ◆ Political education for adults
- ◆ Tackling the poverty cycle with all its consequences
- ◆ High crime rate
- ◆ The HIV/AIDS pandemic
- ◆ Breakdown of culture and family
- ◆ Unity and reconciliation, where there has been civil war and genocide

How is the *Holy Family* in Africa responding to the needs they see as the most urgent and are within their means?

- ◆ Awakening of faith and deepening the Christian life and sense of being Church through workshops, retreats, catechetics, parish groups, parish visitation...
- ◆ Formation and pastoral care of vocations.
- ◆ Formation of Youth, especially girls.
- ◆ Promoting the dignity of the human person, especially women and other marginalised people.
- ◆ Witness to Communion, simplicity and proximity to people.
- ◆ Work for justice.
- ◆ Education, social and health centres, in the latter with a strong emphasis on HIV/AIDS.

If the *Holy Family* Charism were lived fully by all the groups of the Family of Pierre Bienvenu Noailles what impact would this have on Africa?

It elicited strikingly similar responses from all.

The *Holy Family* would model an alternative, challenging society characterised by unity in diversity, communion, relationships, sharing, respect, forgiveness, acceptance... These values would be contagious and the miracle of transformation would take place in society as a whole.

Sharing

At the end of the day small buzz groups shared their feelings on two questions:

- What inspired me most as I listened to our reality as *Holy Family* Apostolic Religious in Africa today?
- Which of our *Holy Family* values do I see being lived out?

Finally, with pipe cleaners for materials, groups of five or six produced a work of art to indicate what the day had meant for them and explained it to the larger group.

A flower and a heart spoke for themselves. The less easily identifiable elicited admiration or amusement when explained.

Aspects of Inculturation in Africa

The next two days, 17-18 January, were devoted to a topic that has taken on great importance in the African continent. In society it is expressed as a call to reclaim traditional African values. In the Church and religious life we use the term inculturation.

It is by no means new to the Holy Family. Included in the Guidelines for Basic Formation drawn up at the International Session on Basic Formation in Martillac in 1996 there is a Declaration on Inculturation. The participants had this before them as they prepared to enter fully into the topic in so far as it concerns religious, and also Christian, life in Africa.

Inculturating Religious Life in Africa

Fr. Buti began his intervention by posing a number of questions:

- ◆ Can we inculturate religious life?
- ◆ Can values of a religious lifestyle similar to that found in the Latin Church be found in the indigenous cultures of Africa?
- ◆ Is there anything in the indigenous culture that approximates to or underlines the value of a life of discipleship built on the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience?
- ◆ Can we call such values by name if they exist even if they were an expression of an aspiration?

Uniqueness of religious life

Religious life is unique. It is a call to radical living, an unconditional giving of self. As a lifestyle that derives from Christ it has no comparison in indigenous cultures. It is a radically new experience, a novel way of life based on the Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth. This does not make it a higher calling than marriage. Both states lead to holiness in their own unique way.

Forms of Consciousness

In the African worldview almost everything - houses, kraals, paths, as well as everyday practices - are silent bearers of a symbolic scheme impressed on human consciousness as a process of socialisation. This worldview is a holistic vision of the universe where the order of values supports a given set of social arrangements. Rites, healing, initiation, first fruits, rain, are pragmatic acts that transform the world and create meaning. It is through participation in everyday life that established cultural forms are conveyed.

Consciousness of a network of relationships

Personhood is achieved through relationships

Relationships are 'multi-plex'. To take some examples:

- Grain, beer, beer pots, metal products contain something of the substance of the producer.

Resources persons

On Thursday, the 16th, a panel of two composed of Buti Tlhagale O.M.I., Archbishop of Bloemfontein and Joaquina Gonzalez hfb, of the community of Rwanda, addressed and interacted with the assembly.

Fr. Buti was General Secretary to the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference when he was appointed to his archbishopric. He is very involved in the struggle for justice in South Africa and, in the past, suffered harassment and arrest from the apartheid regime.

His involvement with the Black Consciousness Movement meant he was an ideal person to address the assembly on the subject of inculturation. Equally important, he is well known as a friend and brother to the *Holy Family* sisters in South Africa.

On Friday, 17 January, Fr. Victor Phalana went deeper into the topic of *healing*. He works in the Pretoria Evangelisation Ministry and is on the staff of Lumko Institute, a catechetical and research centre. Fr. Victor has made a special study of healing in the African context and has travelled widely over the continent in pursuit of his research.

There were also contributions by *Holy Family* sisters, Eleanora Molai and Adelina Lesaoana.

- The firing of pots, the production of blacksmiths can be polluted by social disorder, polluting heat (women's heat especially), sexual relations.
- Products embody social milieu and are life endowed.
- Human subjects and material objects are not definitively set apart.
- The moral, spiritual and physical components are integrated in a mutually transforming relationship.
- The wild is tamed for social ends.
- When there is drought the rain ritual redraws boundaries between domesticated space and the bush.

Maintenance of order

Breaching the moral code threatened to disrupt the divide between the living and the dead.

Ancestors could possess the bodies of offenders and might eclipse their human qualities. They might also withdraw their moral support leaving offenders open to malignant intrusion.

Marginality of women

In defining male and female roles and status cattle served as the point of departure. Cattle were objects of consumption and means of exchange. They were also indicators of many layers of meaning, for example:

- They provided an index of individual status.
- They were a metaphor of social stability and social relations.
- They presented a natural division of labour.
- They symbolised the male productive capacity and social estate.

- They were used for sacrificial purposes to tap supernatural powers.

They stood in contrast to grain. Grain embodied the more transient transformation potential of women. Women were barred from the management of cattle.

Female work was agricultural and domestic. The earth was associated with the female body.

Male work was pastoral, to do with animal husbandry.

Regular ritual renewals of the social fabric legitimated structures of domination and inequality.

Healing

For Africans healing is more than just mending bodily ills. Illness is seen in terms of social relationships whereas in modern medicine it is reduced to physical dysfunction. The purpose of healing is to reveal and reverse the harmful forces that flow among bodies of socially connected people.

Healers diagnose the social causes of affliction. Healers cure by interpreting and treating illness as an embodiment of the intensely human passions and perversities that made and unmade local communities. They act by manipulating words, substances, gestures, by condensing powers otherwise believed to be dispersed in the world.

Vices are like unleashed destructive heat (human heat) that can parch the heavens and scorch crops. But healing is not

primarily a metaphor of invisible forces. It acted upon immediate, immanent social concerns.

The healer's actions are rooted in the concrete, in the application of substances whose names, textures, tastes, hold the key to their curative qualities. They also used different forms of physical treatment such as cupping and inhalation.

This healing ministry addressed body and soul together and healed affliction by restoring ruptured moral and material relations.

Witchcraft

In Africa witchcraft is something more than meaningless superstition. It is linked to social control and change. Witchcraft appears when other mechanisms for resolving tensions between relatives or friends fail. It makes sense because it works. It does things like destroying villages, killing people or animals. Witchcraft is generally used against specific individuals involved in specific social relationships. It is most often a symptom of disorder or what we may call moral collapse.

Communal superhuman presence

The Ancestors are the domesticated dead of the household. They hold different meanings for Western culture and for African culture. The African cosmos is animated by a series of beings from the world of spirit acting on and acted upon by material things and living persons. The Ancestral world is 'a projection into the spiritual realm of the

hegemonic model of social relations among the living'. It is a communal presence; both act together. Ancestral sanction protects social convention and political hierarchy, authority and mores. The power of the ancestors is tapped through the sacrifice of cattle. They do intervene in human affairs and are a source of power and punishment.

There is no acknowledgement of female ancestors.

Communion among the living and the dead is a real communion. The dead are not only christian saints but one bundle of life. The present struggle is a movement from community to individual. The balance is disturbed.

Relations - Community

Work is the point of departure. It includes a wide range of activities from cultivation to making political alliances, to cooking, to making ritual. It yields value in production and reproduction of persons, relations and things. It gives rise to wealth. Production of

value is based on close human interdependence. (Sorcery is its inverse, a negation of values.)

For the African wealth and relations are inherent. The pursuit of wealth involves building ties among kin and affinities such as patrons, clients, men and their ancestors.

Influence is extended by means of creative exchanges, usually through cattle, which secure rights as in marriages and serfdom. Traffic in animals knitted human beings together. Always the same slogan, born of conviction: *Motho ke motho ka batho ba bang* (People are people through other people.).

Renewal

Rededication and recommitment reinforce community values.

- There are the first fruit rites, the ceremonial eating of first fruits by rubbing pulp on to the body.
- Household ashes are dumped in the bush and a new fire is rekindled.

- The annual cycle marks the shift from the uncertain duration of the agricultural season to the more predictable social calendar.

- The absent are ritually reinstated into the group.

Context today

The self has to be refashioned. The use of Christian names and African names is one such point. When looking at Christianity and culture we refer to a mutually transforming play of social forces. Images need to be refashioned to create accounts that are both new and old. Rework rumours and stories that point to moral decay and abuse of power.

'A final quotation

"Contemporary witchcraft, occult practices, magic and enchantments are neither a return to traditional practices nor a sign of backwardness or lack of progress. They are instead thoroughly modern manifestations of uncertainties, moral disquiet and unequal rewards and aspirations in the contemporary moment."



Inculturation and Consecrated Life

In her contribution Joaquina dealt in general terms with the following points:

Inculturation and Vatican II

The Decree *Vita Consecrata* affirmed the urgency of rooting religious life in the culture where it is lived. This led to self-examination by religious congregations and the process is ongoing.

Meaning of Inculturation

The various definitions offered by such authors as Herve Carrier and Marcelo de C. Azevedo present inculturation as an interaction between the gospel and the living culture, a process that requires dialogue and discernment.

The proclamation of the Gospel takes into account the whole culture of a people. A local church will emerge when a local community responds to the Good News from within its own socio-cultural and religious context.

Foundation for Inculturation

The Incarnation is the basis for inculturation. By his incar-

nation, Christ became one with humanity. He humbled himself taking the form of a slave (Phil. 2, 7).

Inculturation of religious life

Having stated what the demands of inculturation are, Joaquina posed the question about how it is to be done. What would be the African way to follow Jesus and be identified with him in so far as this is possible? She called on all to continue to deepen the recommendations on Inculturation given by the 2002 Chapter.

Our Founder and the Institute today

The Incarnation is at the heart of our *Holy Family* spirituality. Jesus Christ took on our human condition and shared it totally from birth to death. It is a call to us to empty ourselves and leave room for the other person or culture to enter into us. In his own time our Founder responded to the needs around

him. The different branches he founded were a means of being present to all.

To see how he saw his daughters on mission we could look at the Preface. He saw them as being close to people, inserted, incarnated, 'companions', in no way separated or indifferent or superior. They were to be collaborators for mutual enrichment, sharing the fatigues, the trials and the dangers of the journey.

The 2002 Chapter launched a new call to mission. The Spirit reminds us that we are there for the mission, sent to live and proclaim communion. Relationship has become an essential value of mission. Our Corporate Commitment also urges us towards the frontiers and is a call to inculturation. It requires us to struggle against exclusion and to affirm human dignity so as to bring about God's dream: to gather the whole of humanity into one Family.

Group Discussion and Dialogue with the Panel

'What has inculturation been like for you as *Holy Family* in the country where you are on mission?'

'What would be the fruits of inculturation of Religious Life in Africa?'

Questions such as these were discussed in small groups. Comments, reactions and questions were brought to the plenary assembly in the afternoon. There were many and the result was a fascinating, lively debate that lasted until it was time to close for the day.

A few of the points raised

The questions raised dealt with all aspects of religious life and how these might be lived in the African context.

- ◆ It was impossible to do this without referring to Christian life and how it, too, is lived and understood in Africa.
- ◆ The struggle to reconcile Christian beliefs with traditional African culture and the deep desire to be faithful to and embrace what is good in local traditions came out forcefully.
- ◆ A strong case was made for the inclusion of the study of African culture in the formation programme so that the candidate will fully understand what she is doing.
- ◆ Inculturation is a new topic and the many different opinions on it can be divisive.
- ◆ It was suggested that a network of communication would be a means of mutual help.
- ◆ The ministry of healing, not just of physical ills but also of people wounded in their relationships and who retain deep hatreds and prejudices, is a felt need in the Catholic Church. If it is not addressed, people will go elsewhere for help.

Concern was voiced about health and population policies urged or even imposed on African countries by donor agencies with or without the collusion of governments. This led to a call for the use Social/Situation/Structural/ Analysis by the sisters to be better equipped to know and understand what is happening around them.

Healing Ministry in the African Context and our response to HIV/AIDS



On Friday 18 January, the emphasis was on the ministry of healing in the African context. Because the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa, this problem was linked to it.

Problems faced by carers in the area of HIV/AIDS.

Adelina Lesaona hfb is part of the team working on a project in Botshabelo in the Archdiocese of Bloemfontein. The project is designed to help people who are HIV positive and those living with AIDS to cope with their condition and have the best possible quality of life. Families and close associates are also helped and trained to accept and deal with the situation. Some information about the project and its implementation was given in Interconnections, no. 7. Adelina enlarged on these details at the meeting and added other aspects, such as the following.

They arise from:

Attitudes of society

- The long delayed acknowledgement and acceptance of the presence of AIDS.
- The stigma attached to the condition leading to rejection by families and community.
- Delaying to seek medical attention.

Training

Lack of skills and resources for conducting training programmes for carers.

Human suffering

- Poverty, high mortality rate.
- Many orphans and child headed households.
- Suicide, from hopelessness, helplessness, frustration and anger at God, self, government...
- Work overload, leading to physical, emotional and psychological stress for patients and helpers.

Dependency mentality

Waiting for help from donors leads to lack of initiative. Paralysis sets in and people dig their own graves.

Some possible solutions

- The healing ministry is a matter of urgency for the Church today. It is not just the physical immune system that is demolished by AIDS. The emotional immune system is also affected. Medical care is not sufficient. People need the healing power of prayer, laying on of hands, rituals.
- Clinical pastoral education is essential. People need accompaniment with compassion and love.

- Finding new ways of responding to the pandemic.
- The care of people living with AIDS should not be left solely to professional medical people. Teachers, Social Workers, Religious, Clergy should take the initiative.

In the dialogue that followed the intervention the question of care for the carers was raised. They, too, need help to be able to face the daily living with terminal suffering and death.



Closing Prayer

Adelina ended her input with a ritual prayer. Three sets of different coloured candles standing in clay-filled pots represented three categories of people: those who know they are HIV positive, those who

know they are living with AIDS and those who do not know.

Each group was named and the candles lit to the sound of subdued African music and appropriate words.

My faith Journey

In simple, moving terms Eleanora Molai, Provincial Leader of Lesotho, spoke of her personal growth in the knowledge and love of God from her early years to the time of her primary education. Influenced by the women of her family she was empowered to leave aside practices that were not appropriate for a Christian.

This early experience gave her a critical mindset that helped her evaluate the worth of both Christian and traditional practices. Eleanora admitted that she may have too readily discarded aspects of her own culture and she is now re-discovering it in all its richness.



An African Pieta

African Traditional Healing and its Challenges to Christianity

Archbishop Buti had already referred to such aspects as healing and the importance of ancestors in traditional African beliefs. In his detailed treatment of healing, Fr. Victor enlarged considerably on these two points. His input was rich and included many examples drawn from personal experience. It was obvious that he practises what he enjoined on his listeners - the necessity of approaching all traditional practices with a critical mind.

African view of illness

Physical sickness is often seen as an indication of the ill health of the inner being. Therefore, healing is sought both at the spiritual/psychic and physical levels. It is not uncommon for Africans to combine traditional medicine and Western scientific medicine as well as both traditional and Christian spiritual help to effect healing.'

The majority of healers use herbs. They are used to deal with physical symptoms and can be taken orally or by rubbing them on the body. Some herbs are used to control the spirits or to remove the curses and powers of witchcraft on the person. Rituals of the slaughtering of animals to communicate with the ancestors and appease them is at times recommended.

Why Catholics consult Diviners and Mediums

People go to traditional healers because of real, genuine, existential problems they

experience in their lives. These could be sickness, anxiety, suspicion, bad-luck, difficult relationships, need to make a decision... The list goes on. They may also wish to communicate with the departed, to know their status, to know more about the spirit world and appease the ancestors. Sometimes people are referred to healers by priests, sisters, psychologists and medical doctors.

Perceived attitude of the Catholic Church

Many Catholics believe that their church does not understand the African worldview and that she dismisses some of their problems as 'superstition' and 'parapsychology'. The gospel as preached in Africa does not seem to touch the people's pressing issues and concerns. The Bible is not brought to life to address their 'problems' such as poverty, sickness, fear, grief, insecurity, hurting marriages... Once more, the list is endless.

This world, filled as it is with fearsome and unpredictable events, demands a response from the church, a response that must be integral and holistic, addressing existential issues, their experiences of pain and suffering. Missionaries and evangelisers totally ignored the African thought pattern. It is a thought pattern in need of evangelisation. It was a seedbed of the Gospel and the failure to evangelise it was an opportunity lost and squandered by ingrained prejudice and ignorance.

African and priests and religious consult traditional healers for the same reasons as other Christians. Most of them go simply to get herbal medicine or herbal treatment. This happens normally when western medicine is not effective or is not available. Some go to get good luck and to increase their 'vital power' or their 'dignity' or even for less worthy causes.

African Spirituality

Spirituality of Traditional Healers

Personal life

Fr. Victor shared with the group how he had underestimated the deep spirituality and sincerity of genuine traditional healers. He distinguishes them

from the charlatans who do not have a real call and are there for financial gain or other wrong motives. He was challenged by the love and commitment of good healers. One of them told

him how she gets up at 4.30 a.m. to pray to her ancestors and offer them libations. This daily ritual keeps her in communion with her ancestors who in turn guide her in her

ministry and continue to give her the information she needs in her work.

Some of the traditional healers practise asceticism in their lives. There are also some elements of celibacy, voluntary poverty, and availability. Some of the prophets are committed to prayer, bible reading and moments of retreat and meditation. During their training they are always reminded of the value of self-denial, sacrifice, the role of pain and suffering in their lives and ministry. They are told that growth in freedom, wisdom, perception, love, closeness to the ancestors and to God will come as a result of self-denial and self-control.

They live their lives fully aware of the presence of the divine and the presence of the ancestors. Through prayers and rituals, night vigils, singing and dancing, they keep in touch with the ancestors and have an intimate relationship with them.

There is no dichotomy between their faith and life since healing is not merely a job. It is a way

of life. Some are truly motivated by African values of honesty, sharing, generosity, fidelity, compassion, hospitality, peace and humility. Genuine healers are supposed to be custodians of morals and virtues in African traditional society. Their wisdom and guidance was often sought by members of the community, elders, kings and queens.

The strength of their spirituality comes from the fact that it is an integral spirituality which promotes a holistic approach to life. To them, life is one: the sacred and the profane, secular and religious, feelings and intellect, body and soul, the spiritual, social, political and economic dimensions are linked together.

In touch with Creation

True healers are in touch with God's creation: with the soil, the earth and nature. Traditionally, they ensured that the community take environmental ethics seriously. Hunters had to observe certain rituals. Pregnant animals were not killed. Grazing was strictly controlled. Certain creatures were sacred and respected by

all. Certain trees were not felled at will. Trees and plants were needed to sustain people as sources of food, for protection and for their medicinal value.

Interpersonal aspect

Traditional African spirituality is committed to the dignity of the human person. A person is considered a person through, with and for the community. Healers get involved in the joys and sorrows of the people and do not hesitate to give their best time to be with people during important life events.

A Mystical Spirituality

In African traditional spirituality there is a strong awareness of the unity of beings in the universe. It acknowledges the connectedness of the unborn, the living, the dead and all those in the spirit-world. Healers/Diviners are experts in traditional rituals. They are present during rites of passage and during times and rituals of affliction when there is a need for balance and harmony to be restored. To perform these rituals, they need moral purity and integrity because healing powers can be eroded by immorality and dishonesty.

Relationship with Ancestors

Ancestors are deceased relatives, the living-dead. They have clear roles. They are guardians of family traditions and values, of the life of the family. They own the land and have the responsibility to fertilise the soil, causing the crops to grow. The land is regarded as sacred because it is the link between the living and the dead.

Ancestors have full access to the communication with the Supreme Being. They can serve as intermediaries and intercessors when the diviner cannot solve people's problems.

They are a source of comfort and consolation to the living, making them feel they are not alone. Their presence is felt particularly

during crisis moments and during celebrations.

Obligations to Ancestors

The obligation of the living begins with funeral rites. If these are not performed properly the spirit does not rest and the family may experience calamities. They must be remembered in a special

way during various cycles of life, especially the rites of passage. They are remembered during the cycle of the seasons and special events.

Ancestors are generally looked upon with love. But there is also fear. Ancestral spirits demand attention, offerings, and gifts. They demand submission and obedience. If they are listened to they bring blessings. If they are neglected they can bring harm.

Challenges to Christianity

The first point to make is that God was in Africa long before the missionaries arrived from Europe. The presence of God can be seen in African cultural values. African culture is not demonic, nor infested with superstitions and unbelief. It is a gift from God which Africans treasure and would like to promote.

While strongly affirming African culture, the African Synod raised awareness of the imperfection that exists in all cultures. For this reason, Fr. Victor spoke of the areas where he feels dialogue is still needed between Christian faith and proper inculturation.

The Challenge of Ancestral Spirits

This can be an area of great conflict for Christians. For a Christian, be it layperson, priest or religious, there is a problem when one submits one's will to spirits other than the Holy Spirit. This can leave a person open to good or bad spirits. Great discernment is needed before acceding to certain demands of the ancestors, such as slaughtering an ox when one cannot afford it.

While insisting that African Christians love their ancestors and do everything to remember them, Fr. Victor declared that new rituals that are authentically Christian and authentically African must be developed. These rituals must take into consideration the role and place of Christ as the ancestor 'par excellence', the Mediator and our eternal High Priest. Ancestors, the saints, all those men and women who died having lived good, moral lives based on authentic African values, can pray and be intermediaries for us with Jesus Christ.

Africans must try and reconcile their attitude to the ancestors and their belief in the

communion of Saints. The Catholic belief that those who have died can intercede for the living harmonises well with the African belief in the role of ancestors as mediators of life and grace through Jesus .

The speaker also dealt with some of the weaknesses in traditional healing. In doing so he put his listeners on guard against unworthy practitioners. They are known by their fruits. Those who encourage suspicion, hatred, jealousy, revenge, fear of, and dependency on the healer are not true healers. Neither are those who practise for money or power.

Syncretism

This is a real possibility. To avoid it, it is necessary to find out those aspects of African culture and traditional religions that can be accepted by Christianity and those that must be abandoned and replaced by other elements from Christianity. A thorough and honest scrutiny of the rituals and religious practices of a cultural group will make it possible to capture the core values of that culture and then identify those that may not be admissible in Christianity.

Question for the Assembly

What calls do we hear today concerning the ministry of healing?

The questions and comments of the assembly elicited further information and insight all of which was brought to the Eucharist, the sacrament of God's love, of unity and healing.

Sustainability, Interdependence

How we manage our finances and resources

It was only about four months since the UN Summit on Sustainable Development had taken place in Johannesburg. The topic for Friday 18 January was, therefore, particularly relevant. The facilitator for the day was Shelagh Waspe hfb. Shelagh works in the Justice and Peace Department of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) and is also involved with the Environmental Justice Desk Group. The Department had followed closely the proceedings of the Summit and participated with NGOs.

Defining Sustainability

Drawing on the impressions of the previous three days during which they had been exposed to the *Holy Family* experience in Africa, and the challenges of inculturation and healing, the participants were invited to come up with a definition of sustainable development, using the following exercises:

- Think of a story (a life situation), that would illustrate where you have experienced 'sustainable development' as you understand it.

The exercise was done in language groups.

After attentive listening and animated discussion each group produced a definition which it presented to the full assembly.

While all the definitions included the elements of that of the United Nations (see box), the groups elaborated on the means to be used and the demands they make on us and all people.

Essential elements that emerged:

- ◆ Interdependence, interconnectedness with one another and all creation.
- ◆ Care, respect and understanding of the Ecosystem
- ◆ Living simply
- ◆ Promoting human development
- ◆ Empowering people, building up their self-confidence and trust in their abilities
- ◆ Continuity
- ◆ Facing and analysing situations
- ◆ Looking for local resources and using them creatively
- ◆ Networking for mutual support.

- Two other questions were addressed, the participants again drawing on their personal experience:

What makes development/growth sustainable in Africa?

What prevents sustainable development in Africa?

The feedback, informed by first-hand knowledge of what happens on the ground, was starkly realistic and practical. It also had many encouraging aspects.

A day of activity, bonding and discovery

An opening ritual performed out of doors was designed to create bonds among the participants as they moved on to this aspect of the meeting.

A net, created by passing a ball of string randomly from one to the other as they stood in a circle, was dropped to the ground and left for the day. Hovering over it were the words of each one describing her feelings at that moment.

Definition of the United Nations

Sustainable Development is a "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Some positive aspects based on African values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect for nature and natural resources • Caring relationships • Working in partnership • The Spirituality of the African people • Sense of justice • Sense of community, belonging and sharing • Growing awareness of human dignity and rights <p>Some negative aspects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corruption • Outside interference: imposition of economic programmes, manipulation of governments to the benefit of external interests, lack of consultation with the population | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of respect for human rights • Exploitation of national resources and people to the benefit of external groups • Political and economic instability • Poverty, debt, natural disasters • Lack of social/structural analysis. <p>In every case, apart from natural disasters, the blame for slow development is laid at the doors of one or several of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • elements in the government, • the population itself, • the donor agencies, • the NGOs, the World Bank and • the International Monetary Fund. <p>Great emphasis was once more put on education and the empowerment of people.</p> |
|--|---|

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Sustainable Development and Holy Family religious life</p> <p>The probing questions came in the afternoon.</p> | |
| <p>How can</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ our vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity ◆ our charism ◆ our community life ◆ the Gospel ◆ help to promote sustainability in Africa? | <p>The answers from the groups were richly influenced by their experience of life already lived in Africa and by the presentations, reflections and discussions that had taken place up to that moment. It is left to each leadership team to take transmit the content as it sees fit.</p> |

In the course of the day Shelagh presented the grid on the following page to illustrate the three ways aid can be given and their effects.

She pointed out that there is a time for each of the three Agents to come into action. When people are starving it is not the time to give them seeds and train them to grow food. Nor is it the time to start analysing the situation.

To achieve sustainable development, however, it is essential that the third action be undertaken.

| Agents | Action | Result |
|--|--|--|
| Church/State Relief Services: St. Vincent de Paul, Catholic Relief Services, Red Cross Religious Congregations | Give in a crisis Service Charity | Passivity Dependence |
| Development Agencies | Train | Self-reliance Independence Passivity |
| Lobbying Human Rights movements | Analysis Important word: WHY? Build: family,village, city, nation | Independence Interdependence |

Closing the circle

In a closing ritual, the whole group came back to the net left on the ground in the morning and took it up again. Under threatening rain clouds, each one mentioned what had touched her as significant that day. There was time for a meaningful sharing before the heavens broke open.

Leadership Issues

During the final two days of the first part of the meeting the participants looked at questions specifically relating to their mandate as leaders. These centred around the Decrees of the 2002 Chapter and the Corporate Commitment and were enlightened by all that had been experienced since the start of the meeting. The new light gained on how to live all this in Africa gave added depth and reality to the reflections.

The task

The procedure was a familiar one. It involved discerning the most important issues to be carried forward in the Institute in Africa by means of prayer, personal and group reflection. The reasons for the choice were also to be clear.

From the points presented the following were chosen as priorities:

- Inculturation
- Formation
- Structural/Social Analysis

The first draft of a declaration to be added to and completed at the end of the meeting was begun.

N.B.

It should be mentioned that FORMATION, a point that came out strongly in the discussion on inculturation, was given special time and attention in the course of the two days.

A time to step aside and rest

On Tuesday 21 January, almost everyone left La Verna for a day of complete relaxation.

Several options for visits had been organised by the South African leadership team.

Among them: game reserves, theme parks, museums, caves, bazaars.

In the evening all came back enthusiastically relating what they had seen and done, full of gratitude for the thoughtfulness of the organisers, Colleen and her team.

The General Leadership Team takes over

The General Leadership Team facilitated the four days from January 22 - 25. Throughout this time the experience of the previous week was very much to the fore in everyone's mind providing sustenance for the important work remaining.

African symbolism and ritual, art and creativity, dance and music continued to be the media used to draw the whole group into a deep, personal, and common understanding of the two concepts and to discern the way forward.

Introduction by Margaret

In her introduction, Margaret set out the specific aims of this stage. Having spent a week looking at the reality of the *Holy Family* experience in Africa they were going to spend three days reflecting on who they are as Holy Family women.

"What is the purpose of our existence that underpins everything we do and everything we are."

The call to do this came from the General Chapter, she said, when it urged us "to be more attentive to our common mission and to the

awareness that more in-depth reflection is needed throughout the Institute in order to renew, re-energise and deepen our commitment".

Speaking of leadership, Margaret reminded her audience of the Chapter's call for a heart-centred style of leadership and the need to move towards this in view of mission today. Time allowed for only a short reflection on the topic together at the meeting.

She referred to recent research findings that conclude that everyone is capable of leadership and that it is a skill that can be learned and improved upon.

From the Opening Prayer

At the beginning of the prayer, each one had a plate (disposable) before her. The food for reflection received over the past seven days had produced a menu of different dishes.

What is to be put on the plates?

After a few minutes reflection each one wrote on her plate the points that had particularly moved or inspired her, to be kept for further digestion.

Light

Light was received by each one stretching out her hand to the Paschal candle lighted and then touching her forehead. With that light they would be able to keep adding to their plates.

Thanksgiving was offered for all that had happened throughout their service for the glory of God in Africa, and for all that had been received in the preceding days.



The Triune God was called upon to accompany them and blessing was invoked on all present.

Moving together on the earth

The final act was an invitation to become conscious of their connectedness with God, with one another and the whole of creation by joining in the dance of life.

A personal and interactive process

A process such as the one used by the facilitators in dealing with the themes Margaret proposed in her introduction has to be experienced to be fully appreciated or understood. This is not the place to give it in any detail.

Suffice it to say that the few days flowed into one another with a barely perceptible change of theme, so interconnected were the reflections, particularly on leadership and mission.

No one kept for herself what she discovered but shared all she could.

Towards a final document

Throughout the process new calls and challenges were being heard. They were added to or served to modify those retained from the first part of the meeting. The task of discerning the most pressing was undertaken by the group as a whole.

The Leadership Teams met as Provincial or Delegation groups when the occasion warranted it. Sometimes the groups were linguistically mixed. This happened, for example, when the topic of formation was treated to facilitate the best possible pooling of experience.

Other matters

Input from the General Bursar

Françoise gave a very lucid explanation of the difference between *pooling* and *sharing*, about which there still seemed to be some confusion.

She also spelled out the Institute's policy on budgets, gifts, help to families and aspirants. Underlying every aspect of it are the demands of our vow of Poverty, Canon Law, and the principles of Justice.

Time was given to

- clarify administrative or practical points concerning
 - the general secretariat,
 - communications
- give information on
 - Associates,
 - Basic Formation,
 - Justice and Peace,
 - Documents of the Congress



Walking gently on the earth

Closing words by Margaret

“Speaking on behalf of the General Council I can say that this first meeting has exceeded all our expectations. It has been a wonderfully grace, life-giving and moving experience. We feel privileged to have had this opportunity to get to know Africa more truly, more deeply from within. Your openness, your sense of responsibility, your concern for our *Holy Family* mission, your communion and solidarity are a source of energy and hope for the future.

You have been able to take

practical steps that will enable us to *Go forward* on this continent with renewed courage, zeal and enthusiasm.

...

We have been given a wonderful gift for our world - the God-given gift of our common mission. Let us allow it to transform our lives. May we live and proclaim it with the whole of our being, at all times and in all circumstances confident that ‘In Jesus we are able to participate in the communion of the Trinity and to share this love with the World’ (Const. art. 17).”

In her ‘thank you’ Margaret remembered all who had contributed to the success of the meeting, the participants, the translators, and secretaries.

The Leadership teams of Lesotho and South Africa received a special vote of thanks for all the work they had put into organising and planning the meeting, work that extended over many months. The South African team, in particular, had continued to be attentive to the needs of all throughout their stay at *La Verna* and in Johannesburg.

The final ceremony



Margaret presenting the document to the S. African Leadership Team

The atmosphere in the hall was charged with joy, energy and a sense of accomplishment as all gathered for the last prayer and sharing.

A significant part of it was the missioning ritual. Margaret presented the document drawn up by the assembly to each leadership team and sent them to fulfil its demands.

DECLARATION PRODUCED AT THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL MEETING, 14 – 25 January 2003

We, Holy Family women in leadership for mission, have deepened the sense of our common mission and commit ourselves to facilitate similar deepening in our Provinces/Delegations/Communities.

Leadership

We wish to live the Declaration on *Holy Family Leadership* in a way that leads to a better understanding of the service of authority and develops the sense of leadership in each Sister in view of the common mission.

We reflected together on our African reality and will take the following action steps regarding:

Inculturation

- We will begin a personal and community process to enable the Sisters to deepen the knowledge of their culture and that of their milieu of insertion.
- In our multi cultural communities we will create a climate of listening, welcoming the other and respect, so as to build mutual trust.
- We will look for means to heal the wounds of the past and go beyond the fears arising from our beliefs and customs.
- We will share information within the Continent of Africa and with the Family as a whole.

References on Inculturation:

Guidelines for Basic Formation,
Declaration on Inculturation,
General Chapter 2002 Recommendations: Inculturation

Basic Formation

We shared on the Guidelines for Basic Formation and we noted that culture and inculturation are included. It is up to us to work on the application beginning from the concrete realities of our milieux.

- Culture is an integral part of Basic Formation and, as such, reflection on culture needs to be integrated into the formation programme as a whole.
- To do this the formators must know well the culture of their milieu and be free within it so that integration can take place.
- We stress the importance of spiritual accompaniment so as to help the young to be liberated progressively from their fears arising from beliefs and customs so that they can grow freely in their relations with God and that **God take the first place**.
- Formation programmes for the different stages will be shared with other Provinces, Delegations and Communities so as to help one another.

Structural Analysis

Motivated by our Corporate Commitment and aware of the exploitation of our African continent we decided to:

- analyse and critique programmes and information offered or presented by NGO'S, Governments, Church etc.
- unite ourselves to groups or networks with those who are committed to the struggle for Justice and Peace.
- Inform and conscientise those who work with us on these issues.

African Continental Meeting

14 - 25 January 2003

Participants

General Leadership Team

Superior General

Margaret Muldoon

General Council

Maria Carmen Vilardell

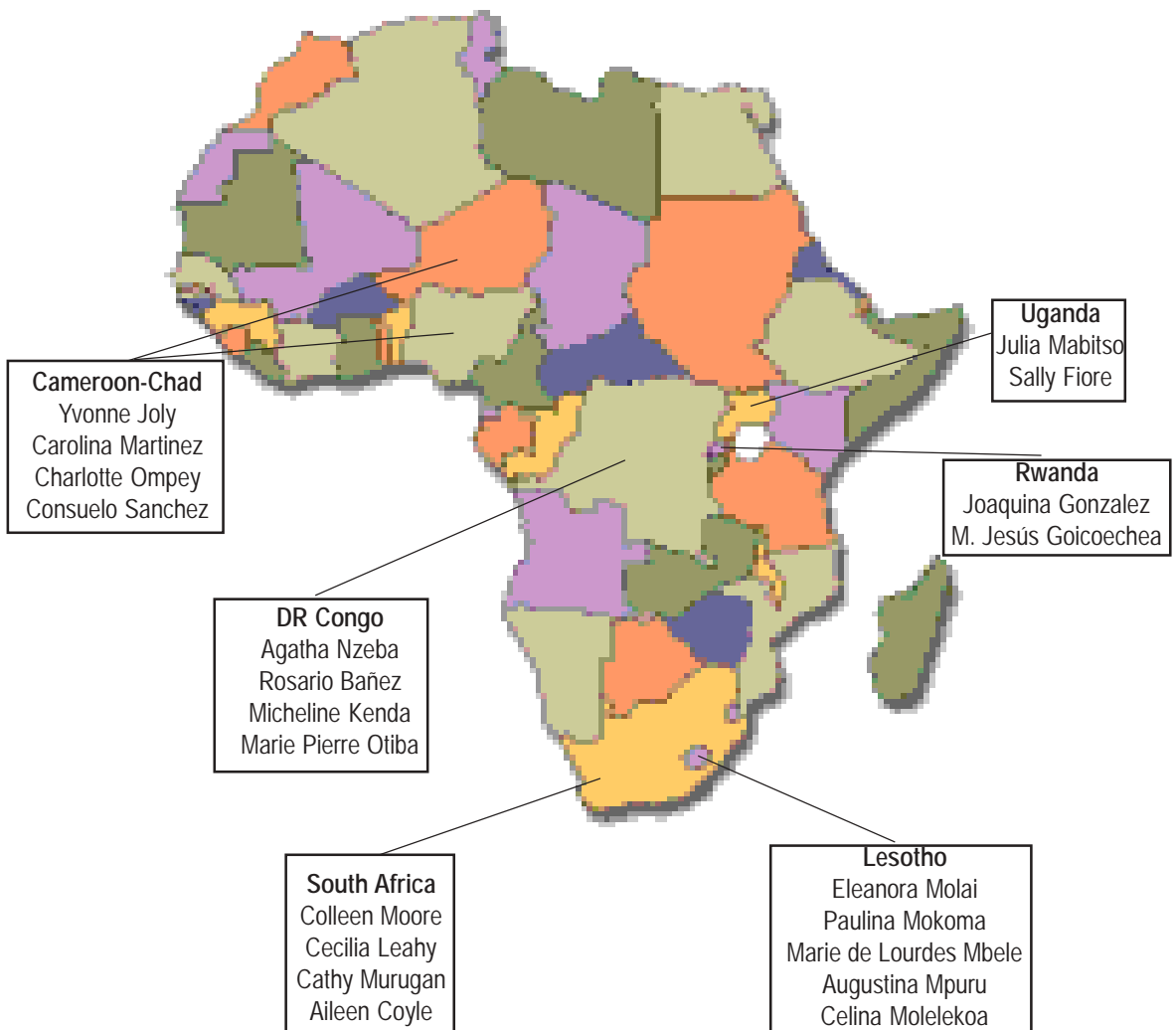
Adela Vanaclocha

Winifreda Wasalathanthrige

Hyacintha Moopisa

Françoise Aubin

Geneviève Bessières



The first name in the list is that of the Provincial, Delegation or community Leader