

# A GUIDE TO INTERNATIONALIZATION

Points of attention and recommendations for religious institutes  
that wish to welcome members from abroad into their midst



*'s-Hertogenbosch, May 2022*

## Table of contents

1. Introduction	.....	p. 3
2. Before candidates arrive	.....	p. 5
3. The process of integration	.....	p. 9
- Appendix: Civic integration process CSSp	.....	p. 16
- Appendix: Orientation program SSpS	.....	p. 17
4. Engagement in Dutch church and society	.....	p. 18
- Appendix: Pastoral Integration Foreign SVD Missionaries	.....	p. 22
- Appendix: Mission Statement CSSp	.....	p. 25
5. Internationalization in monastic communities	.....	p. 26
6. Return to country of origin	.....	p. 29
- Appendix: The experience of a missionary who returned	....	p. 32
7. Appendix: Prevention of transgressive behavior	.....	p. 33

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## Why this guide to internationalization?

During the past decades, several religious institutes in the Netherlands have invited fellow religious from abroad to come and contribute to the mission of their institute in the Netherlands. A number of relatively new congregations from other parts of the world have also founded communities in the Netherlands. There are now around 450 foreign religious in the Netherlands; about half of them are of non-European origin (figures from 2021).

There are many issues to think about when inviting and receiving foreign fellow religious. Is there enough support and capacity to accompany them? What documents need to be arranged in advance? What are the plans for the fellow religious who come to the Netherlands? Are these feasible?

The Konferentie Nederlandse Religieuzen (KNR - 'Conference of Major Superiors in the Netherlands') has drawn up this guide to internationalization for the benefit of the superiors of religious institutes in The Netherlands who have invited foreign members to The Netherlands, or intend to do so. In doing so, KNR wishes to make available relevant information and insights gained during the past decades within various religious institutes. In compiling this guide, use was made of both KNR's own documents (mostly reports of meetings with foreign religious) and policy documents from various religious institutes that have gone a long way in the process of internationalization (SVD, CSSp, SSpS, FDNsc). Furthermore, in preparation, interviews were held with members of various institutes: both foreign and Dutch religious and both active and contemplative religious.

Thus, in this guide to internationalization the KNR offers not so much theoretical knowledge, but mainly the wealth of experiences of its members. In the course of the years, a number of institutes have learned a lot about the processes of internationalization, sometimes through injury and shame. It is good to keep sharing information about this. It is also good to realize that there is no blueprint for the course to be followed. What works for one community does not necessarily work in other situations. Internationalization is work made up of people, which means that the way things turn out depends a lot on the people involved, their personalities, talents, gifts and limitations.

A guide like this one is never finished, because new situations arise all the time, new solutions are found, and sometimes new problems present themselves. A lot can be learned from situations that haven't gone so well. If something is missing in this document or if you would like to share something, please send an email to: [CPR@knr.nl](mailto:CPR@knr.nl)

## What is Internationalization?

The KNR speaks of internationalization to indicate the process by which religious institutes welcome members from other countries into their midst. By doing so, these institutes get an international composition and have to learn to deal with cultural differences between the members of their institute.

The term 'internationalization', by the way, should be used with some caution. This is because it is used for two different processes. It is used in the above-mentioned sense. But sometimes the term 'internationalization' is used when several provinces of a religious institute are merged into one new, international province. This latter form of internationalization is not discussed in this guide.

## Internationalization: sign and response to globalization

Internationalization is not a new phenomenon. Since the beginning of religious life, multiculturalism and internationality have played a role. Some Christians in the first centuries of our era consciously withdrew from the cities, which were melting pots of all kinds of cultures, religions, peoples and languages. In a divided world, they wanted to give a testimony of brotherhood and sisterhood that transcended divisions.

The challenge of forming the one body of Christ undivided is a common thread in the history of the Church and religious life. In the context of current globalization that challenge is particularly timely. People travel all over the world much more easily than in the past. With today's communication facilities, it is easy to maintain contacts and keep abreast of developments elsewhere in the world. In the business world, it is normal to employ foreign workers. Against this background it is not surprising that religious from other continents come to the Netherlands, as successors of the Western missionaries who previously left for distant countries. This also ties in with the modern understanding that mission takes place on all continents.

Internationalization is by no means an option for every religious institute. However, as KNR we can state that the internationalization of religious life is an important development, which will in part determine the future of religious life in the Netherlands.

*'s-Hertogenbosch, May 2022*

## 2. BEFORE CANDIDATES ARRIVE

### Introduction

An important area for attention when preparing for the arrival of a foreign member is that a religious institute has a clear idea of what it aims to achieve. This is discussed in the first section. Further, this chapter discusses the selection of candidates, agreements between the sending and receiving provinces, and the preparation of both the candidate and the receiving community.

### Motives for inviting fellow religious

The process of internationalization demands a lot of energy and time from all involved. And there is no guarantee in advance that it will succeed, because the challenges for both the foreign religious and the host community are great. It is therefore essential that a religious institute ask itself what it is aiming for when it invites fellow brothers or sisters from other countries. Is it primarily to maintain one's own religious institute? Or does the foreign province want to help out by sending members to strengthen the community in the 'mother country' and to take care of older members here, out of gratitude for everything it has received? Both the "survival motive" and the "gratitude motive" are a very narrow foundation to carry the intensive, demanding process of internationalization.

What is a firmer foundation? This can be discerned by asking oneself the question of the meaning of one's own charism in a changing world. Globalization and multiculturalism are determining factors nowadays. Internationalization can be a possible response. Whereas in earlier times it was common for religious communities to consist of only people from one country, today an openness to cultural diversity is a necessity for future religious life. In a period of confrontation between different cultures and oppression of minorities, religious are called to show a concrete model of living together; a model that demonstrates that it is possible to live together as brothers and sisters when one recognizes the dignity of the other and allows him or her to share his or her gifts. This can be a reason to ask fellow religious from other parts of the world to come here and present the charism of their religious institution in their own, specific way.

By living together as brothers and sisters in international communities, a religious institute provides a tangible witness that dialogue and the intercultural sharing of goods and dreams is a value in itself. This is consistent with Pope Francis' vision of the role of religious in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In "Rejoice," his circular letter to the religious (2014), he writes: "Fraternity is the first and most credible gospel we can proclaim. We are asked to make our communities humane."

The presence of foreign religious in the Netherlands can also become meaningful if it is done in solidarity with all those other migrants who are making their way in the Netherlands. The foreign religious experience the same problems with culture shocks, difficulty in learning the language, with residence papers and work permits. At the same time, they often bring with them experiences of living within a multicultural setting. These can be very useful in the country that receives them.

### Capacity of the receiving community

For the receiving province, the arrival of foreign members requires a considerable investment: financial, material, affective. It is a long-term commitment. The receiving communities must be able to accompany, support and help the newcomers to discover the surrounding culture without too many shocks. It must support them in learning how to deal with an ecclesiastical and social situation

that is quite different from that in their own country. It is important to ask oneself whether one has the means and people to do this.

Community life also changes when fellow religious from another country and another culture, in most cases also much younger people, arrive. Is a community prepared to be disrupted in its habits, to be questioned in its certainties and its way of life? Sometimes a foreign religious discovers that the members in the receiving province have doubts about his or her arrival. That of course can be painful.

### Selection of candidates

It is recommended that all involved in a decision to send someone out – council members or superiors of sending and receiving provinces, as well as the candidates themselves - take time for a process of discernment. Ensure good communication among those involved about expectations and desires.

Because the transition to the new situation demands a great deal from candidates, a religious institute must look not only at a candidate's professional qualifications, but also at emotional and spiritual maturity.

*Spiritual maturity:* A mature prayer life can help one to stand firm in difficult situations. Tensions and problems can be brought to prayer. Prayer also sharpens discernment, which can help in situations that do not offer easy solutions. In addition, the specific spirituality of a congregation can help to create a sense of belonging among members of different backgrounds.

*A flexible, open attitude:* Candidates must be open to a different culture and not be afraid to work in the complex reality of a secularized society. The transition from a non-Western society in which religion plays a prominent role to a Western, secularized society requires special qualities: a willingness to seek God's presence in another culture, even in a very secularized culture. One must accept that priests or religious are not necessarily put on a pedestal. Religious priests must be well aware that in their parish they will be faced with a way of governing in which they do not necessarily have the last word in making decisions.

*Motivation:* Special attention should be paid to the motivation of candidates. Members involved with formation can play an important role here. Entering an international institute should not be motivated by a desire for a higher standard of living or the opportunities offered by living in a Western country.

*Several foreign members at the same time:* For the dynamics within an international community, it is desirable that several foreign members can be present. This provides the necessary interaction and exchange among themselves. Thus, the foreign members can also be deployed in different places and take sabbatical periods at different times, etc.

Of course, the above enumeration of qualities and conditions offers an ideal picture. In practice, one does not know in advance whether someone will make it. Good communication between the sending and receiving province is and remains important. If a candidate really does not succeed in finding his or her place here, then all parties involved can evaluate what happened and what can be learned from it.

## Agreements between sending and receiving provinces

If, after the process of discernment, a decision is made to send someone, it is recommended that proper agreements be made regarding responsibilities, length of time and finances.

### *Place of accountability:*

It is good to be clear in advance about authority structures and rights and obligations. To whom does a religious who is transferred to another province or region report? How are the active and passive voting rights regulated? Do the foreign religious retain voting rights in the sending province; if so, for how long? Do they automatically have voting rights in the receiving province or region? If so, do they lose voting rights in their own province?

### *Financial arrangements:*

These are agreements about:

- expenses prior to departure: family visits, retreats, preparatory courses, travel expenses, cost of living during the period of transfer
- allowances or salary earned by the deployed person in the host province or region
- financial reports
- health insurance and pension contributions

### *Duration:*

This involves agreements on time duration and evaluation. Will someone come for a fixed or indefinite period of time? What are good moments to evaluate? When should the period of time be renewed? Who will be involved in that decision?

## Preparation of candidates

### *Study of language and culture:*

A thorough preparation of the foreign religious is desirable. That begins with learning the language and becoming acquainted with the social and ecclesiastical situation in the country one is going to. It is not always possible to arrange for a good language study in the home country and a solid orientation on geography, climate, history and the social and ecclesiastical situation. But one can make a start, for example:

- by using written material and video material
- through contact (via mail or social media) with fellow religious in the receiving country
- through meetings with others who are about to go on mission in a European country and to share expectations and fears
- through meetings with fellow countrymen and women who have returned from the Netherlands or Dutch nationals in the homeland
- by taking a course or studying missiological insights regarding inculturation of the word of God in modern, Western societies.

It often turns out to be difficult to prepare people individually for their new mission. Local training programs are often very clerical. Some institutes have had good experiences with younger members who have been trained in Europe and have thus had a taste of the conditions in a western country. Some institutes allow young members to do an internship in an interfaith context and in another culture during their training. This experience sharpens sensitivity to cultural and religious differences.

### *Sending away and support*

Before someone leaves, one can organize a sending-off ceremony with fellow religious, parishioners and others, perhaps with a symbolic act such as handing over a mission cross.

The “home front” is and remains an important source of support. With modern means of communication, it is much easier than in the past to keep in touch with friends and relatives.

However, this can also be a pitfall. Too much contact with the home front can be an obstacle to settling down well.

### *Permits*

A prosaic but important part of the preparations is to arrange residence and work permits for foreign religious. The status of professional qualifications must also be researched in advance.

### *Members of general councils*

With regard to preparations, the situation of people elected to a general council is different from that of contemplative religious or members who will be active in a pastoral or missionary setting. Council members usually have limited time, usually no more than a few months, to arrange the move and prepare for their arrival. For the new council member, the transition is actually very abrupt. This cannot be completely avoided. But it is good that the fellow-brothers or sisters in the country where new members of the general council realize how big the change is and deal with it with understanding and create space and time for their foreign fellow-brother or sister to become at home here.

## Conclusions and recommendations

- Keep the goal in mind when foreign members are invited. What is the meaning of one's own charism in a changing world?
- Make sure that all those involved – superiors of sending and receiving provinces and the candidates for mission themselves - take time for a process of discernment.
- Make sure there is enough support and capacity. Is the host community willing to make a long-term commitment to the new members? And are they able to guide and support the newcomers?
- Communicate with all those involved what the expectations and wishes are, both before someone comes and during his or her stay. Evaluate and learn together from things that are not going well.
- Ask the sending province to look at the emotional and spiritual maturity of candidates, their ability to seek and find God in a secularized context, their ability to learn a new language, their motivation.
- For the dynamics within an international community, it is desirable to have several foreign members present.
- Make sure that the foreign religious prepare themselves as thoroughly as possible before departure, with language study and study of the social and religious context.
- Make clear agreements with the sending province about responsibilities, duration of the mission and finances.
- Be aware of the requirements for residence and work permits.



### 3. THE PROCESS OF INTEGRATION

#### Introduction

A good knowledge of language and culture are the foundation of any effort in church and society. Experience shows that it takes a lot of time and effort to learn the Dutch language well and to understand the Dutch way of doing and thinking.

The first section of this chapter describes the culture shock of newcomers and points out the importance of inculturation and interculturalism. The second section deals with language learning and the process of integration. The third section deals with counseling for both individual members and communities.

#### 1. Learning to deal with cultural differences

##### *Culture shock*

Foreign religious have to let go of a lot when they settle in a new country and culture. Many things are so different: climate, eating habits, the way hospitality is expressed, the place of family, the way decisions are made, the way of praying, liberal thinking. The transition to a highly secularized society is a big challenge. Their identity as a priest, religious sister or brother is a point of discussion in the Netherlands. They have to let go of the old image they had of their religious status, because that often doesn't mean much to people. They understand little or nothing at first about polarization in the church and liberal views on all sorts of religious-ethical, social and societal issues.

There is a risk that the newcomer judges too quickly about the new situation, without much understanding or appreciation for the developments within the Dutch context. But if foreign religious are going to do missionary and pastoral work here, they will have to learn to adjust such a negative attitude towards the Dutch culture and church, customs and practices.

In the Netherlands, many volunteers devote themselves in all kinds of ways to a better world and to vulnerable people: the sick, the elderly, the homeless, refugees. In the event of disasters, many Dutch people give generously to charities. There are many professional organizations that care for the neediest, near or far. The foreign religious also notice this.

Explicit attention to the positive aspects of our secularized culture and the role of religion in it (a faith that is not linked to powerful religious institutions and is subservient to society) can help soften the culture shock.<sup>1</sup>

*"As a foreigner, you only have 'viability' if you start making your own relationships with 'the here and now', and respectfully acquaint yourself with the environment where you have landed. Step out into the world! Learn to love the land you live in. Don't shut yourself up in your own little world."*

- speech by Theo Vergeer OFM during a meeting for foreign religious in 2003

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<sup>1</sup> You could, for example, read together the book: 'Geloof en godsdienst in een geseculariseerde samenleving' (*Faith and religion in a secularized society*), by mgr. Jozef De Kesel, published by Halewijn, 2021. ISBN 9789085285885

### *Cultural clashes within one's own community*

Not only climate, culture, society and church are different, but also one's own congregation or order. The ecumenical attitude of many Dutch fellow religious and their views on all kinds of religious, ethical and social issues are at first often strange to newcomers.

The difference in mentality between Westerners (often very goal-oriented, businesslike) and people from Asia, Africa or Latin-America (more person-oriented) can be a source of difficulty within an international community.

Besides cultural diversity, generational differences also play a role. The older generation of Dutch religious sometimes tends to belittle the younger, foreign members, even though the latter are often not that young at all. A complicating factor is that the foreigners have often been taught to show respect for the elderly. Foreign religious sometimes remark that their Dutch fellow-religious tend to think they know better and thus dominate conversations. In this way they prevent the members from abroad to develop initiatives. Some even remark that one sometimes feels more like an object of help than a subject capable of giving help. It is essential to give the foreign fellow religious space to deal with matters in their own way and to take initiatives.

### *Contact with one's own roots*

Many foreign religious feel a strong need to be among their compatriots, to speak their own language, to eat dishes that they know from home. It is good for them to experience the familiarity with fellow countrymen and one's own traditions. It relieves the loneliness that everyone feels from time to time. The mother tongue is and remains the language of one's own heart.

At the same time, a warning is in order here. It is tempting for newcomers to often seek out their own cultural sphere. This can get in the way of the inculturation process. The current means of communication can also be an obstacle to really becoming at home. Discuss this with each other and hold each other accountable.

### *Inculturation as a continuous process*

The cultural shock can last for months and even years. Sometimes it repeats itself later on. It is important during these periods to let the foreign fellow religious feel part of the community, the local setting and the local church.

Foreign religious who have been here for a long time describe a development that goes from adaptation to acceptance of their own individuality and own unique contribution. In the first years, they put a lot of energy into learning the language and the new culture. In this initial period, people tend to adapt as much as possible. Only later, when people feel less insecure about their environment and their own functioning within it, do they succeed in shaking off their 'tendencies to adapt'. They learn to accept that they are different in some respects, with a foreign accent and their own cultural background. And they discover that they can offer things from their own background and personality and that this can be an enrichment for everyone. It takes pain and effort to get to this point. But these religious also indicate that in this whole process they have experienced an enormous growth as persons. The experiences in another culture and another country give a broader vision of life. It makes it easier to put things into perspective.

### *From multicultural to intercultural*

An international or multicultural composition of the community does not automatically mean that there is a fruitful interaction between the different cultures within a community. Those who demand adaptation only from the foreign religious overlook the fact that the receiving communities must also adapt to make room, not only literally but especially figuratively, for the foreign members.

It requires great sensitivity to deal with power relations in a transitional phase. Dominance of a particular cultural group - numerically, in occupying positions of responsibility, in managing material resources - stands in the way of fruitful cross-cultural interaction. It is important to be aware of one's own racism and cultural biases.

A diverse composition of a community can prevent one particular nationality from dominating. Experience also shows that religious with missionary experience abroad can play an important role in an international group, since they have experienced firsthand what it means to be a stranger and have learned to deal with cultural differences.

Tony Gittins CSSp has written an enlightening article on interculturality in religious community life based on the practice of international communities. He writes that members of the same community, who are united by the same faith and share a common vocation and vision, are called to create something new out of the cultural diversity in their community in a joint effort: a "home" where each person, without losing the core of his own culture, is willing to step out of his own "comfort zone" and allow himself to be changed by the presence of the other. In the digital version of this guide on the website of the KNR, the article by Gittins can be found as a pdf. Click on 'Integration' and go to this section of the chapter.

## *II. Language study and civic integration*

The importance of learning the Dutch language cannot be stressed enough. It is not only about learning the words and grammar, but also the context in which they are used: the customs and habits. Words go hand in hand with gestures, facial expressions, body language, eye contact and voice inflections that must also be learned for effective communication. This is best learned when interacting with people. That is why it is important to meet people, get to know them and learn to appreciate them. It is good to encourage the foreign fellow religious to go out and get involved in activities in the parish, neighborhood or elsewhere. The mandatory integration course is a real help for many. It can help to live for some time with a family or in a community with Dutch religious. Much can be learned from a child who does not care to repeat a sentence as many times as necessary.

Good language schools are needed for the basics. But these are sometimes hard to find. The course offerings are limited or very expensive. Many language schools offer just basic courses (up to level A2). In most cases the target level should be B2.

Some institutes encourage their foreign members to pursue further studies based on their interests and what the congregation needs: pastoral work, social work, theology, accounting, IT, etc. Through study they also learn the language better and learn more about the situation of the Dutch church and society. It also gives the foreign religious an intellectual or spiritual qualifications that can be taken with them when they return to their own country.

At the end of this chapter two examples are offered, as an appendix, of what a language and integration trajectory can look like: the orientation programs of the Spiritans and Missionary Servants of the Holy Spirit.

#### *Meeting and consultation with members of other congregations*

The KNR organizes various meetings for younger religious: meetings for formation leaders (twice a year) and other meetings of and for younger religious around various themes. Many foreign religious participate in these. They are moments to meet fellow religious, Dutch and foreign, and to exchange ideas and experiences. Meetings with others, including foreign religious who are members of another congregation or order, help them recognize that they are not alone or that their experience is not unusual. One has similar experiences and can learn from each other. On the website of the KNR under 'agenda' a list of meetings can be found.

In the Beraad Missionarissen in Nederland (BEMIN) members exchange experiences and discuss topics concerning foreign missionaries and their mission in the Netherlands, such as: parish work as mission, pastoral care for migrants, formation and guidance, the gap between old and young, etc. In this way, among other things, a Course in Ecclesiastical Integration was established by the Nijmegen Institute for Mission Studies. The course aims to familiarize foreign missionaries with the history and current situation of religion, church and mission in the Netherlands. You can request information about this via:

### III. Accompaniment on an individual and communal level

#### *Accompaniment of individuals*

It is advisable that shortly after arrival one discusses with the newcomer a number of practical matters concerning community life, what tasks there are, what is expected of him or her, also concerning language study, integration and what the Immigration Department does or does not allow. On the one hand, it is necessary to listen carefully to their first experiences. On the other hand, experience also shows that they need to know what is expected of them. The newcomers also need encouragement and confirmation from time to time, so that they feel that they are appreciated and that they are doing well.

Good guidance is extremely important. Often an institute will ensure that there is a personal companion (from outside the community) with whom the foreign religious can discuss what is on his or her mind, what is helpful or what they are up against.

Sometimes newcomers react strongly when they hear that they must receive mentoring or do internships. They have often just finished their training and assume they are ready for their missionary tasks. However, it is not about guidance in the sense of a learning or training process, but rather personal guidance in which one is encouraged to process and integrate the church and social integration (in the broadest sense of the word).

#### *Exploration of region and country*

Some congregations encourage their newcomers to continue exploring the country by giving them a bicycle to explore the area. Sometimes they provide a subscription for train travel so that newcomers go out at least once a month to explore their new country.

For many foreign religious, the bond with the diocese they are part of is important. It is therefore good that they get acquainted with the local church leaders and with the bishop or vicar general of the diocese. In the case of religious priests, an official letter of appointment from the bishop can confirm the sense of belonging to the local church.

To help the newcomers get to know and understand the new living and working environment, regular information meetings can be organized: on the history and current situation of church and mission in the Netherlands, history of the Dutch province of the institute; on community life, finances, hospitality, liturgy and prayer, identity as a religious/priest, role of lay people, working in a team, missionary pastoral care, prevention of transgressive behavior, etc.

#### *Accompaniment of the community*

The usual course of events within a community can be radically altered by the arrival of fellow religious from abroad. The same spirituality is no guarantee of unity within a community, since each has his or her own way of shaping it.

By no means will everything be self-evident after the arrival of fellow religious from abroad; celebrating birthdays, for example, has no meaning in some cultures. Especially in the beginning, misunderstandings easily arise, sometimes caused by language skills that are still inadequate or misunderstood jokes, sometimes also by the Dutch directness of speech, not to mention the difference in age.

The way in which religious vows are understood and lived can differ. While for Dutch religious second-hand items can be an expression of their evangelical sobriety, foreign religious sometimes have difficulty in the beginning with second-hand items. Some Dutch religious note that their foreign religious are very spontaneous and informal on a personal level, but that in the area of liturgy and community structures they are very formal. They cling more tightly to formal authority relations.

Cultural issues within an international community include:

- Language: make clear agreements about the use of language in a group or community. The Dutch must be careful that the other person really understands them. In many cultures there is a tendency to say 'yes' out of politeness or respect, even if one does not quite understand what it is about or actually does not agree.
- Food: give the foreigners the opportunity to eat food from their own culture with some regularity.
- Liturgical forms: the signs and symbols one uses should reflect the composition of the group.
- Family ties: these weigh more heavily in many southern cultures than in the Netherlands. Contact with the family is very important.

#### *Attention to the mutual dynamics in the community*

An additional but important aspect is that the foreign religious are used to living in larger communities. In the Netherlands, since the 1960s, small communities have often been established where a very different dynamic prevails. That too requires adaptation.

Incidentally, it is often not so much cultural differences as the tensions between characters and personalities that cause the greatest problems in a community. The presence of an external facilitator at community meetings can be very helpful. The facilitator must be able to create an open

and safe atmosphere in which community members also dare to express emotions. The facilitator must insist on openness, including on sensitive issues. Lack of openness can break up a community.

#### *Guidance at the level of the province / region*

Institutes with several international communities in the Netherlands regularly organize meetings for all members of these communities, together with the provincial council. They evaluate life in the communities and their activities, and they discuss subjects and issues that are related to their pastoral and missionary work.

Often a member of the provincial council is responsible for what concerns the international communities. The future of the Institute and the input of the international communities has an important place on the agenda of council meetings and reflection days. Concrete matters such as language courses, residence permits, integration, missionary formation, etc. are discussed in the meetings.

Some institutes organize European meetings for all young members working in Europe. In these meetings they share their experiences and discuss topics that are of concern to them.

#### *Points of attention for the international functioning of the religious institute*

Within a religious institute as a whole, internationalization has consequences in many different areas. Those responsible for formation within the institute must ensure that the international character is constantly nurtured and developed. In the formation of new members, attention can be paid to learning a second language, if necessary, by doing an internship in another country for some time.

It is also a good thing when the writings of the founder are translated and thus made accessible to all within the institute. It is also important for the institute as a whole to have a clear policy regarding the common language used within the institute: during general chapters, in reports and publications intended for the whole religious institute. All this takes time, money and energy, but it is important.

#### *Mutual enrichment*

It takes courage and creativity to form international communities, despite all the differences; and to see these differences as an enrichment. Internationalization is a venture of which there is no certainty beforehand that it will be successful. But many involved also indicate that the venture is worthwhile.

A comment often heard from Dutch religious is that with the arrival of foreign fellow religious new vitality, as it were, flows into the community. Spontaneity and warmth are qualities they often mention in connection with their foreign fellow religious. Often they are able to break entrenched positions and patterns of the community. Within many of the internationalized institutes, people indicate that they are happy with the foreign religious and cannot do without them.

## Conclusions and recommendations

### *Interculturality*

- Integration must come from both sides, newcomers as well as the older members.
- Give space to the individuality of the newcomers. In practical terms, this means, for example, that they regularly get to eat types of food that they know from home, that attention is paid in the liturgy to symbols and customs from their countries. It also means that they are given the opportunity to take initiatives in their own way.
- Let newcomers, especially in the difficult initial phase, feel that they are really part of the community and that their contribution is welcome.
- Be aware of the power relations and dominance of a certain cultural group. A diverse composition of a community can prevent one particular nationality from dominating.

### *Learning the language*

- A good language course is necessary for the study of Dutch. The target level for religious who take on tasks in society or pastoral care is B2.
- Encourage fellow foreign religious to meet others, to get involved in activities in the congregation, parish, district or elsewhere. It may help to spend some time living with a family or in a community with just Dutch religious.
- Make clear agreements about the use of language in a group or community.
- A study or thorough course can help him/her understand the language and the Dutch context better.

### *Accompaniment*

- Clarity is important. Discuss with the newcomer what his or her tasks are, what is expected of him or her, also in terms of language study, integration and what the Immigration Department does or does not allow.
- Introduce newcomers to the local church situation, for example by organizing a meeting with the local church leaders and with the bishop or vicar general of the diocese.
- Good personal guidance is extremely important for the foreign religious. It involves a listening ear and helping them process the transition to the Dutch context.
- Organize regular information meetings to inform newcomers of the history and current situation of the congregation or order, and of the Church and mission in the Netherlands.
- The presence of an external facilitator at community meetings is very helpful. He or she should be able to create an open and safe atmosphere in which the members of the community also dare to express emotions.
- Encourage foreign fellow-brothers or sisters to meet fellow-religious from other congregations, for example by attending (study) meetings.
- At international meetings of your religious institute, discuss how to nurture and develop the international character.

## ANNEXES

### Appendix 1: Integration Course Spiritines

Step 1: Soon after arrival the new fellow-brother starts learning Dutch. It takes an average of one and a half to two years to reach the target level (B2) or state examination. Mastering this level means that in most situations one can express oneself in a comprehensible way and can understand what is being said and written. It remains important, however, to put what you have learned into practice as much as possible in order to improve language skills further.

Step one of the language study takes place in one of the communities with the help of a private teacher and a fellow-brother. They do speaking exercises with the new fellow-brother and introduce him to Dutch society. For him it is at the same time a good introduction to a Dutch community. Furthermore, there are possibilities to let the other brothers help him with reading the texts and readings of the Eucharistic celebrations in an understandable way. The stay in the community usually lasts three months.

Towards the end of this stay it is advisable to have a conversation with the new fellow-brother about his expectations and wishes for the further integration process: possible opportunities to participate in parish activities, getting to know the active communities (during weekends), receiving driving lessons, etc.

Step 2 takes place in the community in Berg en Dal, from where the new fellow-brother receives language lessons - from level A2 up to and including level B2 - at the language institute of the Radboud University (or elsewhere). A private tutor goes through the material with him and prepares him for what he can expect at the examinations. It is important that the private tutor have contact with the language institute tutor to discuss progress and any problems.

From level A2 it is time to bring the new fellow brother into contact with Dutch-speaking people. Such contacts are important to put the theory learned at school into practice. The possibilities for this are in the nearby Cenacle parish church (Heilige Landstichting) and/or in a shelter for homeless people or community center. It will enhance his motivation.

The language study is followed by a pastoral integration training of several months, intended as practical and mental preparation for the new, future work environment, which differs from that in the mother country. The activities do not have to be (exclusively) pastoral, but the Congregation does consider the knowledge and experience gained from such a training to be a basis for further functioning in the Netherlands.

For this training a parish is needed and a good supervisor who introduces, helps and coaches the new fellow brother. It is the intention that the new fellow brother, through participation, gets acquainted with the daily working practice in a typical Dutch context, experiences the reality and impact thereof and learns to act and reflect on his own functioning within it.

A gradual build-up of this learning process is desirable, from acquaintance to observation, to assistance, to independent functioning and then evaluation. Things to be dealt with are: preparation for sacraments, for presiding at various kinds of services, such as prayer services, funerals; home visits, attention to the 'apostolate of presence' as a basic attitude and method; diaconal activities; parish administration and church law; cooperation in a pastoral team and with lay people (adapting



to the 'culture of consultation'); and the personal interest of the new fellow brother. The training also offers the opportunity to learn to find a balance between pastoral work, life as a religious (within a community and congregation) and personal time.

The new fellow-brother must be informed about the objective, approach and duration and must himself indicate what he wants to learn. He indicates in a short report what practical pastoral work experience he has. The objective and the wishes of the congregation and of the new fellow-brother must be well discussed in advance with the contact person within the parish. Together a schedule of activities is drawn up.

The evaluations are intended to help the new confrere gain insight into his functioning and development within a new environment. But also to discover what his strong points and weaker points are. This requires an open learning attitude and the ability to deal with constructive criticism in order to be able to develop oneself further.

## Appendix 2: Orientation Program Missionary Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS)

Our goal is: for the sister to feel at home as much as possible. Since 2003 and until now, Tilburg has been the home base for newcomers. When a new sister comes to our Province, we take the following steps:

1. First language school is Jeroen Bosch in Vught for basic Dutch.
2. Second, the sister goes to Leiden University for levels 1 to 6, with a view to the civic integration state examination.
3. Still during the language study the sisters are introduced to the different communities and the different activities of the sisters, especially in parishes and within different organizations.
4. Once the sister has mastered the language, she has more opportunities to go outside.
5. When the sister expresses the wish to continue her studies by following a course or training, we give her that opportunity as well so that she can further develop herself in terms of language and can deepen her knowledge of the Dutch church and society. The study depends on her interest.
6. Hopefully this study will also give the sister the opportunity to work in a paid job.

It is our experience that the sister who follows a course, grows in self-confidence, in language skills, in social contacts, in her personality, etc.

## 4. ENGAGEMENT IN THE DUTCH CHURCH AND SOCIETY

### Introduction

Foreign religious who receive an appointment in the Netherlands are active in all kinds of fields. Some have an administrative function (provincial council or generalate of their institute). Many work in parishes or in various forms of categorical pastoral care. Some come with an explicitly missionary mission. Furthermore, there are religious who work in the care of elderly fellow sisters and brothers, study here or live in a contemplative monastery. In the following the different fields of activity are described and the issues which one sometimes encounters.

### Individual apostolate or joint apostolate?

When a number of institutes invited foreign members from the 1990s onwards, the idea was often that the newcomers themselves had to find their mission by 'being present' among the people (mission as presence). The intention was nice, but often it turned out to lead to uncertainty and discontent about the vagueness of tasks. Foreign religious often indicate that they like to have clearly defined tasks at an early stage.

In countries in the southern hemisphere schools or hospitals are still very important for many religious institutes. In the Netherlands, the government has taken over many tasks in the field of education, social work and health care. Nevertheless, it may be worthwhile to develop something of a joint apostolate. Some congregations - sometimes with fellow religious from the same city - set up small-scale social projects, for example a drop-in centre or offering meals to the homeless.

### Parish pastorate as a form of mission

Religious priests who come to the Netherlands often have a need for a parish as a 'home base'. By no means all of them have had experience working on the social margins. They have been trained as priests and want to work as priests.

An additional advantage of working in a parish is that it is a strong incentive to learn the language well. A parish is also a good place to become at home in the culture of the country, including the religious culture. In short, it is an excellent place for integration.

As noted elsewhere, working in a parish also offers substantial challenges. The position of priests is different than in the home country, where people look up to priests. That is much less the case in the Netherlands. Here they have to work with lay people, sometimes highly educated, theologically trained people. That requires a lot of flexibility and a certain humility.

The SVD has described in a document "Pastoral Integration of New Foreign Missionaries" the steps to prepare newcomers practically and mentally for parish ministry. See Appendix 1 at the end of this chapter.

To work in a pastoral setting, the Code of Conduct for Pastoral Care applies and a Certificate of Good Conduct is required. Therefore, during the period of integration, pay specific attention to the prevention of transgressive behavior, because issues such as dealing with power and intimacy are experienced differently in each culture. Advice on prevention can be found in the appendix "Prevention of Transgressive Behavior" at the end of this guide.

The desire of foreign priests to work in parish ministry leads to tensions in some missionary congregations, because the Dutch members often have a different vision of how their mission in the

Netherlands should be interpreted. Gradually, several congregations have come to understand that mission and parish pastoral work can, in principle, go well together. It is about being attentive as a pastor to the universal mission of the church, working to ensure that the parish is a welcoming place for people with questions of faith, that there is a commitment to inter-religious dialogue, justice, peace and the wholeness of creation. See, for example, the Spiritinians' Mission Statement in Appendix 2 at the end of this chapter.

In practice it often proves difficult to find a good balance between pastoral tasks, missionary efforts and responsibilities within the congregation. This is and remains a point of attention. Furthermore, when a missionary community is established to take on pastoral tasks in a parish, it is advisable to discuss its own vision in advance with the bishop and the parish council.

### Commitment to justice, peace, wholeness of creation

In their formation, many foreign religious learn that it is important to work for justice, peace and wholeness of creation. In their own countries, they have seen at first hand the destructive consequences of unjust structures, of exploitation and of the plundering of natural resources. They know that it is important to pay attention to issues of justice, peace and wholeness of creation in their own congregation and in the parishes where they are active.

Furthermore, some of them come from regions where people are used to living together with different cultures and with people of different religions. This leads some to engage in intercultural and interfaith dialogue.

### Paid work in non-pastoral sectors

Paid work not only provides a financial basis for the community, but also gives a certain self-esteem. However, women religious from abroad find it difficult to find paid work in the pastoral sector. This limits their options. In many cases, especially during the first years of their stay, they are forced to focus on volunteer work in a parish or in diaconal-missionary projects. For younger sisters, it is painful not to be able to work outside their congregation. When women religious are in the Netherlands for a longer period, more possibilities for paid work open up. The condition is that they are well prepared for a professional commitment by means of formation and (language) study.

The prognosis is that in the future also for male religious fewer paid positions will be available in parish ministry. For this reason it is also wise that they prepare themselves by means of study for professional work in non-pastoral functions.

### Pastoral work in migrant parishes

Returned Dutch missionaries have played an important role in migrant pastoral work because of their familiarity with other cultures. In recent years, more and more foreign religious, both male and female, are taking on tasks within migrant parishes. The atmosphere in migrant parishes can be a relief for them: for example, the spontaneity, many things come about without long meetings. The fact that also foreign religious are going through or have gone through an integration process creates recognition between them and other migrants. Dutch religious note that their foreign fellow-religious often find it easier to reach foreigners because of their origin and mentality.

Engagement in a migrant community can however also be a pitfall. When someone does not feel at home in Dutch society and church, a migrant church can function as a refuge, a home away from home. It is important for the foreign religious who are active in migrant pastoral work to keep the objectives of this pastoral work in mind: to promote unity in the community, to promote cooperation

with other migrant communities, to promote communication and cooperation between migrant churches and Dutch churches.

### Spirituality and Formation

Almost all foreign religious note that many people in the Netherlands are spiritually searching. The future of the Church and the Christian faith in the Netherlands is of concern to them. Often they explicitly mention how important they think it is for religious in the Netherlands to reach young people. Especially members of younger congregations from abroad often are involved in formation activities for young people and evangelization.

### Involvement in elder care of one's own institute

In the culture of foreign religious, reverence and respect for the elderly is very important. Sometimes a foreign province of the institute offers to send members to care for elderly fellow brothers or sisters in the Netherlands. Gratitude for all that the Dutch have done in the past plays a role in this. As noted in the section 'Before a candidate comes to the Netherlands', this 'gratitude motive' alone, is too narrow a basis for coming to the Netherlands.

But it happens that foreign religious who have been in the Netherlands for some time are at some point appointed within the care of elderly fellow religious. In preparation for that, it is essential that they understand how the care system in the Netherlands functions and learn to accept how professional care providers work. In addition, it is good that foreign religious who perform such tasks also have the opportunity to develop activities in Church and society, so as to give shape to their vocation and charism there as well.

### Leadership roles in their own religious institute

Many foreign religious eventually find their way in the Church, society and their own religious institute. Some institutes consciously work to prepare foreign members who have been here for some time for leadership positions in the congregation. In a number of institutes they are elected to the provincial council or appointed provincial superior. This often requires specific guidance in the beginning. For example, a foreign member will have to receive a good explanation of the financial situation of the institute, how financial reserves have been established, how the money is invested, etc. In the Netherlands there are clear and transparent procedures for the approval of acts of extraordinary management.

It is also important to guide them in the field of organizations which the religious in the Netherlands have created together: the KNR and the services it offers, solidarity funds, scientific institutes founded by religious, etc.

In several institutes it has been experienced that foreign members have a positive input in the provincial administration. They have their own approach, which sometimes opens up new possibilities.

*"We consider this process an investment in our own congregation; it is not just for our own province. Even if they go back later, they will take away a valuable experience that will benefit the whole congregation."*

- Peter Denneman SMM

The situation of members of General Councils coming to the Netherlands is very specific. Until recently, quite a few General Councils of congregations with a Dutch origin were based in the Netherlands. Newly elected members in the General Council had to prepare themselves in a short time for their arrival in the Netherlands. Once here, the administrative tasks require so much time and energy that it is almost impossible to engage in other activities. In recent years, however, many General Councils have moved their headquarters to the country where most of their members are.

## Conclusions and recommendations

- Don't let newcomers 'swim'. They often have a strong need for clarity about what they are coming here to do. It may be worthwhile to develop something of a common apostolate, for example through small-scale social projects.
- Religious priests often want and need a parish as a 'home base'. A good preparation for a pastoral task in a parish is indispensable, both in a practical sense (language and inculturation) and mentally (being able to function in a secularized context, being able to cooperate with highly educated lay people).
- It is necessary that foreign religious are well-informed about security requirements of church and social institutions. Therefore, organize a course on prevention of transgressive behavior for newcomers.
- It is not easy to find a good balance between pastoral tasks, missionary efforts and responsibilities within the congregation. Before foreign priests take on tasks in a parish, it is advisable that they clearly communicate their own vision of parish ministry to the bishop and parish council.
- Following a course of study is necessary for a professional commitment in the Netherlands in non-pastoral functions. This will become increasingly important for foreign religious in the future.
- Many foreign religious get involved in a faith community with people from their own homeland. Be careful that their involvement in a migrant church does not form an obstacle to really becoming at home in the Dutch church and society. Keep the objectives of the migrant pastorate well in mind.
- Foreign members who are appointed within the care of elderly fellow religious should have good knowledge of the care system in the Netherlands and be able to cooperate with professional care providers. In addition, it is good that they have opportunities to engage in other activities in church and society.
- Prepare foreign members who are going to take on a leadership role in their religious institute by, among other things, giving them a good explanation of the financial situation of the institute, and by making them familiar with organizations that the religious in the Netherlands have established together (KNR and the services it offers, solidarity funds, scientific institutes founded by religious, etc.)

### Appendix 1: Pastoral Integration of New Foreign SVD Missionaries.



#### Introduction

Missionaries are sent out by the worldwide congregation SVD to its provinces and regions. This used to happen from the North to the South, today it is the other way around, and there is also exchange between East, South and West, and vice versa.

This includes missionaries who are sent to Europe, which is also mission territory according to the Congregation. Foreign missionaries have been working in the Dutch-Belgian SVD Province since 1989. Their integration into the Dutch Church and society did not prove easy and it was therefore necessary for the provincial council to pursue a more active policy of helping them. This happened from 2011, when an increasing number of foreign missionaries were appointed for the Netherlands (currently there are 22). A guidance committee was set up which put together an introduction programme in order to prepare these new, younger fellow-brothers in a more structured way than before for life and work in this country.

#### Introduction program

The purpose of this program is to equip the new, younger brothers, most of whom are about 30 years old and ordained a few months before arriving in The Netherlands, in about three years with sufficient tools to function adequately in this SVD province.

The program currently consists of two main components. Shortly after arrival, the newcomer begins by following ***an intensive course in Dutch***. The SVD devotes a lot of energy and attention to this. It takes an average of 1.5 years to reach the target level (B2) plus state examination. (Such a diploma offers students of foreign origin access to Dutch-speaking higher vocational education and university education) Mastering this level means that you can express yourself understandably in most situations and also understand what is being said and written. It remains important, however, to apply what you have learned as much as possible in practice in order to improve, deepen and refine your knowledge.

With the second main component of the introduction programme, the ***pastoral integration***, the SVD wishes to prepare the young fellow-brother practically and mentally for the new, future working environment, which differs from that in the mother country. As a missionary of the Divine Word, future activities are partly in the pastoral field and the Congregation sees the knowledge and experiences gained through this integration phase as a basis for further functioning in our country.

#### Pastoral Integration

The implementation of this phase requires external help and cooperation. Not only must there be a parish, there must also be guidance available that introduces, helps and coaches our fellow brother. This paper attempts to explain to all concerned the background to this phase, what the SVD intends to do with it and to provide tools for its realization within a parish. The steering committee was inspired by the principles and working method of the Cross Cultural Training Programme of SVD's Chicago Province.

In preparation for functioning independently after the introductory period, the SVD wants the new fellow brother to gain experience with a wide range of parish activities over a period of about 6-9 months. It is explicitly not the intention to repeat the training in the mother country nor to assimilate, but rather that the fellow brother, through participation, *gets acquainted with the daily working practice in a typically Dutch context, experiences the reality and impact of this himself, undergoes it and learns to handle it, and reflects on his own functioning within it.*

This participation also offers the opportunity to learn to find a balance between pastoral work, life as a religious (within a community and congregation) and personal time. What does this new environment, this typically Dutch context look like? (Often/possibly) in contrast to the mother country, the church official here is confronted with the consequences of secularization, democratization and emancipation processes, such as for example:

- The modest social status of priests.
- A limited and aging number of churchgoers with few young people.
- Diversity among parishioners. Theological/ religious prior knowledge for example, ranges from limited/ based on dated views to academically educated.
- The position of the priest, who in the Netherlands functions within a team. Decisions are made in consultation, there is a lot of deliberation.
- The important role of (often academically educated) lay people in the parish.
- A society that is very critical of the RC Church, among other things because in the eyes of many the Church hierarchy is conservative and because of (the approach to) sexual abuse.
- Empowered citizens, with a direct communication style.

And further,

- The work is systematic
- Discussions are conducted in a businesslike manner, there is open communication.
- Punctuality is very important
- Team play
- The priest has an important role in assisting and dealing with grief and mourning. Next of kin do not have a solid support system from the family here.
- Diaconate and liturgy must be linked. Liturgy should not be separate from social life.

## **Organisation**

### **Guidance**

There are a number of "parties" involved in this integration phase:

- A contact person from the congregation. This person is well aware of all the objectives and agreements. He monitors the progress of the process and maintains contact with all those involved.
- A work supervisor (and first point of contact) from the parish. Both for fellow brother and SVD, and for the members of the parish team.
- (External) supervisor who helps the intern reflect on the work experiences, and process those experiences personally (and theologically?) during pre-planned meetings. Verbatims and/or keeping a diary can be a good tool in this learning process.
- A language buddy to help the foreign fellow brother with the preparation of for example (but not exclusively) sermons. Textual feedback on word usage, images, metaphors, number of words/ length of the sermon and grammar of course, but also feedback on intelligibility and pronunciation is very desirable. In fact, the younger brother still has to master the 'professional language'; this was never paid attention to during his general language courses.

## **Preparation**

Before the start of this integration phase, the congregation must make sure that:

- The fellow-brother is well informed about the objective, the approach and the duration and also indicates himself what he wants to learn.
- He writes down in a (short) report what practical pastoral work experience he has.
- The contact person within the parish is well-informed about the aim, the wishes of the congregation and the fellow brother; in consultation with the fellow brother draws up a (global) activity plan and makes agreements about evaluation (form, points of attention, moments). This contact person should also communicate this within the parish team so that everyone is aware of her/ his role (to prevent misunderstandings during this period).
- This schedule and these agreements should be put in writing in advance and sent to the various parties so that they are clear to everyone.
- If an external supervisor is available, he or she must make the purpose of this process and the working method very clear to the fellow brother. The meetings should be planned and recorded in writing and this planning should be sent to the work coach and contact person of the congregation.
- Agreements must also be made with the language buddy/ sermon coach. (contact moments, intention, learning wishes)

## **Implementation**

A gradual build-up of this learning process is desirable, from introduction to observation, to walking along, to independent execution (of a project) and evaluation.

The following activities should be covered (but perhaps not all are feasible). Possibly some components can be offered in the form of 'field explorations'. Frequency/ duration of the various components cannot be determined exactly here.

1. (preparation for) sacraments
2. Preparing for / presiding at various kinds of services, such as funeral services, etc.). If possible also with a sermon coach.
3. Home visits
4. Attention to the 'presence apostolate' as a basic attitude and method of working
5. Various apostolates (if possible). Diaconal activities (with attention to missionary aspects)
6. Parochial administration and church law
7. Working together in a pastoral team (culture of consultation)
8. Personal interest of the intern
9. ....

NB. It is important for all concerned to see that just before this integration phase our young fellow-brothers have completed their formal language course by taking the four state exams. Their Dutch language competences are therefore still school-based and have only been applied to a limited extent in everyday and professional practice. This is a phase (the one from theory to practice) that belongs to further language development, but requires some patience and understanding from the Dutch-speaking colleagues/parishioners.

## **Evaluation**

Evaluations are intended to help the fellow brother gain insight into his functioning and development within the 'new' environment. The fellow brother needs to understand this evaluation purpose well, because in addition to his strong qualities, there will of course be



elements with which he struggles. Weaker points will be addressed. This requires an open learning attitude, being able to deal with constructive criticism in order to then be able to develop yourself further.

*October 17, 2017 - Guidance Committee New Missionaries SVD*

## Appendix 2: Mission Statement CSSp

*"We want to realize our mission in the service of the local churches in areas such as missionary pastoral care, formation work, attention to universal mission, religious dialogue and ecumenism, social and educational activities, promotion of peace and justice and integrity of creation and youth work. One of the spearheads is to involve and form the laity and work with youth and young adults. We want to challenge people to pay attention to the challenging power that emanates from Jesus of Nazareth and his gospel, for the life of every person. We stand for a Church with open doors, a welcoming place for people with questions about faith, for people searching for the meaning of life. A place where old and young feel at home and are given space to live out their faith and doubt. We try to embed the pastoral care of foreigners and migrants in the local parish community, while preserving their individuality, so that in this way they mean something to the local church. As a missionary community we are open to what is going on outside the Church and to those who have turned their backs on the Church; to young people with an open eye to North/South relationships and to cultural differences; to those with an interest in religion or who feel called to our missionary way of life and work; we seek ways to foster this attitude of mind in them. We are looking for a parish and a presbytery, where there are opportunities for the community to be able to give substance to our missionary vision, i.e. "to proclaim the Gospel to the most abandoned", in addition to its pastoral work, preferably in a larger city and in a multicultural neighborhood."*

The Spiritinians further express the desire that the establishment of a missionary community be done in good consultation with the bishop and that the parish council be involved as much as possible in its preparation and implementation.

## 5. Internationalization in monastic communities

### Introduction

In monastic life a development towards greater internationality has been going on for some time. This is related, just as in other communities of religious, to the globalization and digitalization of 21st century society. Several monastic communities in the Netherlands currently have members from abroad, including members of non-European origin.

Many aspects of intercultural living together discussed in the other sections of this guide also apply to communities of contemplative religious. But the specific nature of monastic life, particularly its enclosed character, means that the intercultural process within these communities has its own emphases. In this section we describe these and share advice and suggestions from the practice of some monastic communities.

### From uniformity to universality

Many monastic orders spread out over different countries after their foundation. Unity in way of life was for the founders the bond that connected all the houses. Everywhere they followed the same way of life, i.e. the same rule, liturgy and customs. Because of this, it did not matter what people, race or language you belonged to. This uniformity could be maintained for a long time since the monasteries were only in the Western world.

A number of orders took very seriously the call of Pius XII to implement contemplative life in the churches in the mission countries. Monasteries and abbeys were founded in many countries in the southern hemisphere. These new communities were open to vocations from their own countries. But for a long time the Europeans had tight control. Thus novices often had to do their novitiate in Europe. In fact, monasteries in the southern hemisphere were often European monasteries with a European leadership, with a number of brothers or sisters from the mission country. A certain mistrust of the abilities of people from the mission country sometimes played a role in this.

In the second half of the 20th century the numerical center of gravity of the Church shifted to the southern hemisphere. In many countries there, religious life is growing and flourishing. Monastic life has also taken root. As a result, equality within monastic orders has also grown. Nowadays monasteries in the Netherlands sometimes call on their own order for support and help from southern countries in periods when the community has become too small. Sometimes there is also the consideration that young monks from other countries should be introduced to monastic life in Europe.

### E-knocking

Another element in the growth towards internationalization is the so-called e-knocking, i.e. candidates who no longer apply at the gate of the monastery but via Internet. Many monastic communities pay attention to digital presence in the world by means of their own website, social media and digital newsletters. In a society where being seen is very important, this digital presence has become increasingly important. Thanks to the internet it is easy for candidates outside our borders to make contact with a monastic community in The Netherlands.

The question can be asked whether to accept candidates from outside the Benelux or to refer them to monasteries in their own country or surroundings. If that is a problem or impossible, one can choose to invite the candidate for a long-term internship to get acquainted. It is important to have conversations beforehand, such as via Zoom or Skype. It is also important to ask for references. Asking the candidate to arrange for a visa himself/herself is often a good test of whether the candidate is really motivated.

### Questions to be answered in advance

The most important question that the host community should ask itself in all honesty is why people from other countries and cultures are being invited to join. If it is purely about survival, then it is doomed to failure. In practice, monastic communities often already have contacts with fellow religious from other parts of the world. Sometimes monastics from other countries come to the Netherlands to rest, to "recharge" or otherwise. This often leads to a fruitful exchange between communities. From this sometimes arises the idea of helping each other to continue community life.

Before a community takes the step of inviting foreign members, it will need to be well informed about what it means to be a multicultural community and what is involved. If there is genuine openness and a willingness to learn from each other, then this step can be fruitful for all concerned.

There are also a number of practical questions that need to be answered beforehand when welcoming brothers or sisters from another community:

- Does one take in novices or not? If the receiving community cannot offer initial formation, candidates must go through the novitiate and the period of temporary vows in their own monastery.
- Does one move stability or not? Does the monk coming from abroad remain a member of the monastery of entry or not?
- Is the stay for a limited period or for an indefinite period?

### Becoming at home in the community and society

Monastics who come from abroad are exempt from the legal obligation to follow an integration course. After all, they do not perform pastoral work. But a good knowledge of the Dutch language and situation is essential. Just as for active religious it is desirable that they already begin in their own country with the study of Dutch and orient themselves to the social and ecclesiastical situation in the Netherlands.

To learn a language well requires a lot of practice with many different people. This can be difficult to achieve in a community where little is spoken and where people live in greater seclusion. Another obstacle in learning the language may be that the community continues speaking English, German or French with the foreign fellow brother or sister.

Another difficulty may be that the newcomers are formed monks or monials. Adapting to new forms can then pose a problem. If the monk or nun remains under the authority of the monastery where he or she entered, acceptance of authority in the new community can be a problem.

The cultural differences can be very striking. It manifests itself in all kinds of things: sense of hierarchy (respect for elders and people in positions of authority), food, devotion. The differences require a lot of adjustment and resilience on both sides.

As a receiving community, it is good to know about the country and community where people come from. It is a good idea that the whole community pays attention to the culture, history and customs of each other's countries. And for this reason, leaders and other members of monastic communities could visit, if possible, the monasteries where fellow brothers and sisters come from. In this way, one builds a bond between the sending and receiving community.

*"You cannot change the other so easily. Recognize that the other is different. Their rooms, for example, are furnished the way they were used to at home. We Dutch have a sober style, which they don't adopt so easily. Space is the key word. You have to give the new sisters space, and you have to create space in yourself. Taking time for the process; accepting the other culture."*  
- sister Lucia van Steensel OCD

### The charisma that connects

Not only in the case of differences of culture, but also of characters, it is helpful to repeatedly focus on the charism of the community and to discuss with each other the question, "Am I/are we willing to allow our character to be transformed in the service of the charism for the good of others? Or do I continue to cling to my own self?" The leader must keep the conversation open each time around the shared charism, creating space for unity in diversity.

An international contemplative community can be a great evangelical witness to the charism of praying and working in one community. If monks and monastics already cannot live, pray and work together around Jesus Christ in one community, how can we expect society to do so?

### Conclusions and Recommendations

- Keep in mind what is intended when foreign members are invited. The question of the meaning of one's own charism should be guiding.
- Speak with the sending community about questions such as: to accept novices or not; to move stability or not; is the stay for a limited period or for an indefinite period?
- When candidates from other countries apply by digital means, make sure there is good communication beforehand. This can be done through online interviews.
- Take time before making a decision about entry. For example, the candidate can be invited for a long-term internship to get acquainted.
- Encourage the foreign religious to begin studying Dutch in their own country and to become familiar with the social and ecclesiastical situation in the Netherlands.
- Make sure that the foreign religious receive good language instruction in the Netherlands and have enough opportunities to put the Dutch language into practice.
- Cultivate the ties with the sending community, for example, by paying attention to its culture and customs, if possible also by mutual visits.

## 6. RETURN TO COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

### Introduction

The experience of missionaries, wherever they are in the world, is that over time one changes, one becomes alienated from one's own country and culture. When missionaries are on leave in their own country, they know that it is for a short time. They meet family and friends and prepare for the upcoming period abroad. But already during the periods of leave they experience how they are no longer completely at home in their own country. The missionary understands the language, but still does not understand certain things. Often they experience being between two worlds. There is so much that they have not experienced in the mother country, while at the same time they cannot fully share their own story about what they experience abroad.

Foreign religious who have lived in the Netherlands for a longer period of time are thus awaiting a new culture shock upon their return to their own country. They have changed and in the country of origin they have to find a place again. Many foreign religious say that in the Netherlands they have come to appreciate the democratic way of leading, the efficient way of meeting, the quality of commitment in all kinds of volunteer work, the punctuality of appointments, the ecumenical attitude, the direct way of communicating, etc. These are the experiences that they take back with them to the mother country.

In the following, several points of attention are described and suggestions are made as to how to manage the transition between the time in the Netherlands and returning to the home country.

### Making the decision to return

A longer period of time usually passes before the decision is made to return to the country of origin. Age plays a role in this. When people reach a certain age, they are faced with the choice of either staying in the Netherlands or spending the last phase of their lives in their own country. Some congregations have a rule of thumb that people return to their mother country at the age of 75. It may be that one chooses to stay here and die here. In that case, the arrangements surrounding the order's or congregation's own cemetery must be looked at so that fellow religious from other countries can also be buried here.

Sometimes people just don't manage to get grounded here. A rough estimate is that in 20% of the cases people do not succeed in finding their way here. The discernment process leading up to this decision can be painful, both for the foreign religious and for superiors. For the foreign religious, the decision may feel like a loss of face. Good guidance is very important especially in this kind of situation. The superior or a fellow religious can try to help understand the decision and give it a place. In this way, a certain sourness or bitterness after return can be prevented, or at least alleviated.

The provincial superiors in the Netherlands and the province of origin should be involved in a decision to return. Be honest and open in the communication between all those involved. In some institutions, the superior general must also be informed and a formal request for transfer is addressed to him or her.

## Preparing for return

During the period of preparation for return the religious concerned:

- lets go of commitments and projects and transfers responsibilities to others.
- prepares for return in prayer; "Where is God leading me?"
- looks back on the life and ministry of the past few years.
- speaks about his or her feelings and emotions that the farewell evokes with an understanding listener.
- thinks about how he or she wants to keep in touch with good friends in the Netherlands.
- recognises that the changes that are coming may be stressful.
- maintains contact (email, telephone, social media) with the provincial/regional superior of the institute in the country of origin.
- makes plans for a period of vacation, rest, retreat, and renewal courses. The provincial/regional superior in the country of origin can provide appropriate information about this.

## Celebration of departure

The returnee could plan a departure ceremony. During this ceremony the person concerned can express how his or her stay in the Netherlands has changed him or her and what personal gifts he or she will bring back to his or her own country.

In this ceremony the own community can also have a role by telling the person what they have received from him or her and symbolically sending the person back to the country of origin.

## Re-entry

It is important that communities be properly prepared to receive people returning to their own country. The community in the country of origin must recognize the special responsibility it has to facilitate the re-entry of returnees.

Adjustment to the 'new' situation takes time and can be facilitated in the initial period after return by:

- Celebrating the re-entry. The congregation, the local community, the local church, family and friends welcome the returnee in a liturgical celebration.
- the realization that friendships and family relationships need to be developed again. So much has happened during the absence that relationships change as a result.
- ensuring that there are people who can familiarize the returnee with the local situation.
- Have regular discussions with trusted individuals within the community or a designated person.
- allowing time and opportunity for the returnee to digest the impact of all the changes before taking on new responsibilities.
- attending courses, taking a time of renewal to integrate a changed sense of self, a changed worldview, a changed understanding of the church and a changed spirituality.
- contacting others who have gone through a similar transition. It can be good to organize sessions for returned missionaries: reminiscing together, sharing experiences with people who understand what they are talking about.

If the returnee has adapted reasonably well to his or her own culture, it is good if he or she shares experiences in some way with the province/church/society of origin. It is also nice for the people left behind in the Netherlands to hear from the returnee how he or she looks back on the stay in the

Netherlands. See also the Appendix 'Experience of a Returned Foreign Missionary' at the end of this chapter.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

- A process of discernment about return requires time and guidance.
- Provide good guidance when the decision is made to send back a fellow brother or sister from abroad prematurely, because the mission here is not succeeding for whatever reason. A trusted person or counsellor can help the missionary to understand the decision and to process it.
- Consider, in a timely manner, whether fellow foreign religious will spend the last phase of their lives in the Netherlands or in their home country. What are the consequences for the person concerned? What should the order or congregation in the Netherlands arrange in one case or another?
- Give the person returning time and space to prepare not only practically but also mentally for return.
- It can be appropriate to prepare a departure ceremony for the returnee, in which he or she looks back on his or her stay in the Netherlands and others share what they have received from him or her.
- Discuss with the province of origin the reception of the religious returning and what can be done there to facilitate the re-entry.

## Appendix: The experience of a returned foreign missionary

There is now a large group of foreign religious who have returned to their own country after an extended stay in the Netherlands. Elsy Varghese SSps went back to her native India in 2003, after a stay of over 12 years in the Netherlands. In a letter written to her fellow sisters, she evaluated her stay in the Netherlands:

*"When I look back on these 12 years, I have a sense of accomplishment and of gratitude, a really happy feeling and even a certain amount of pride. I see these 12 years of my life as valuable and educational and important for gaining experience. In my work here in India I notice that people see me as someone with a broad experience. I feel that my horizons have widened in terms of the way of thinking and looking at things and I am happy about that.*

*Of course in the beginning I had difficulties [in Holland] with the adjustment, especially with the food. And the climate remained problematic for me. But when I look back now I see that pain and those difficulties as valuable.*

*I don't know if I came with the idea that I would be a missionary, like some of you who came to India. I just came with an open mind and an open heart: let come what comes. Evidently I was a stranger in a strange land. I felt that I was welcome and I felt that the sisters and the people with whom I came into contact were doing everything to make me feel at home. My fellow sisters gave me all the freedom to do what I wanted to do, which I consider one of the strongest points of the time I was in Holland.*

*Perhaps my "dancing apostolate" gave me ample opportunity to be part of the Dutch community through the use of my talent. I believe that being a sister had an influence on people's lives. Perhaps this influence was also felt in my apostolate among less privileged women who ended up in brothels. I felt grateful and fortunate to have been able to work as a nurse. After all, that was what I had been trained to do, and it made me feel that I belonged to a professional group. When I got up in the morning I knew what I was going to do that day and the next day. That's why I think it's important to have a certain amount of training. I was also happy to be able to make a financial contribution, although I know that money is not the most important thing, emotionally it is an important aspect. I think I was able to share my Indian spiritual wealth through meditation, Indian music, religious dances, etc. Everything I learned in this respect during my years in formation, I was allowed to share in the Netherlands. My basic spirituality was given to me at home by my parents, brothers and sister. During my years in formation this was extended. I think I passed on these aspects of spirituality personally by praying with people, through personal conversations and by listening to them. Those were moments of sharing spirituality for me.*

*I felt welcome when I arrived in Holland. But the preparations for my arrival were too limited. I had to find my own way, of course with the help of the house superior. It would also have been better if I had known the language better. The younger you are, the better you can learn it.*

*[...] This period was important for the rest of my life. I think maybe it was those years (between 30 and 45) when everyone wants to do something. You could call it "thriving," the most creative time in a human life. But we can also flourish and be creative in other periods.*

*However, when I look back at my life in Holland, it was a time of flourishing. That is certainly only possible thanks to the acceptance and love of others and I was fortunate to receive these in abundance... Thank you to God and all of you!"*



## 7. Appendix: Prevention of Transgressive Behavior

### Introduction

As religious, our task is to contribute to a humane society and a just world and to the full development of humankind. The dignity of every human being is based on the Biblical view that people are made in the image and likeness of God. That dignity is therefore a great good that must be valued, protected and preserved.

The scandals of sexual abuse in the Church have shown how important it is to pay attention to a personally and collectively supported culture of prevention of transgressive behavior that affects the dignity of others. This is true not only in the area of sexuality, but also more broadly: for example, dealing with power and money. In all these areas, cultural differences play a role. It is therefore a good idea to also pay attention to these aspects during the integration process. The remainder of this section discusses the prevention of sexually transgressive behavior.

In a 2018 restatement of the mission of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, the following sentence stands out: "Inculturating abuse prevention and protection into the life and action of local churches remains the PCPM's future goal and greatest challenge."

(<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/02/17/180217c.html> )

The internationalization of religious life makes it necessary to be mindful of how prevention should fit into each specific culture. Different cultural backgrounds are also reflected in different ways of dealing with intimacy and sexuality and in differences in behavior and communication in that area. How people deal with intimacy, how, whether and when they touch each other, varies greatly by culture, by gender and across generations. Thus, there is no single correct way of doing things. It is of great importance to pay proper attention to this in formation.

In addition, sexual abuse and Me-Too affairs have recently caused a culture shock, which has led to many shifts in recent years. A new kind of caution is growing, which is, however, also expressed in different ways.

### Concrete points of attention

#### 1. Institutional

- Institutes that transcend the boundaries of church provinces and countries have to deal with a multitude of rules and norms. The Dutch Code of Conduct for Pastoral Care (<https://www.knr.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Gedragscode-Pastoraat-2018.pdf> ), for example, does not apply outside the Netherlands, even though the principles are quite universal. The same applies to our way of working with official declarations of good behavior etc. Partly with an eye to processes of internationalization, the code of conduct has been translated into English. You can find it via this link: Code of Pastoral Conduct - 2018 (<https://www.knr.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Code-of-Pastoral-Conduct-The-Netherlands-2018.pdf> )
- Internationalization requires new institutional frameworks. Attention to the enculturation of prevention should be given a place therein from the beginning, both institutionally, socially, and in terms of (continuing) formation. On the institutional side, make sure there is a clear structure of responsibilities and rules regarding reports and the investigation of complaints.
- When someone is transferred to another province or region, ask for a declaration from the previous superior (or bishop if applicable) that this person has not been guilty of sexual abuse in the past. Standard forms for this are on the KNR website: <http://www.knr.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Formulierantecedentennl.pdf> , also in English.
- When a member or candidate goes to another province for study, formation, living or work, without formally becoming a member of that province, make sure that it is clear under whose responsibility the person is.

## 2. Social

- Within a familiar environment, we know the boundaries and mutually desired patterns of behavior. In a new environment different patterns of behavior apply. Foreign religious must also be guided well in this area.
- Keep in mind that leaving your environment also means that you leave behind the social control that belongs to your own circle. This, too, builds up again only slowly.
- Studies on abuse and prevention have often pointed to a link between getting into a personal crisis and lapsing into transgressive behavior. In a foreign situation, people are often less resilient. Foreign religious often feel - certainly in the initial period - uncertain about their place and role in the Netherlands. Herein lie risk factors for both perpetration and victimization of transgressive behavior.
- Shame and group honor can play a role between members with different backgrounds. The Code of Conduct for Pastoral Care of the Dutch Church Province urges the collegial addressing of each other in case of concerns about someone's physical and mental well-being (paragraph 8) or in case of possible transgressive behavior (paragraphs 5 and 6). However, addressing one another collegially often proves difficult in practice. There is also the fear that one might offend the other and upset mutual relationships. At the same time everyone realizes that action must be taken when a fellow religious does something that cannot be tolerated. Often one expects the superior to say something about it. It can be helpful in the formation of religious to work on a form of participatory leadership in which everyone is made responsible for the good course of events in a community and the welfare of its various members.

## 3. Formation

- One of the things that has the clearest results in the field of prevention is special attention to 'human formation', both during initial and ongoing formation. See also the Prevention Guide 2013 , chapter 1, with the corresponding literature.
- In both initial and ongoing formation, attention should be paid to maintaining an atmosphere of mutual safety, learning to set one's own limits and respect those of others. What a person can or cannot do, should first of all be practiced and discussed in one's own circle/community.
- This subject should not be approached with fear. After all, intimacy and sexuality are beautiful and desirable, but they do come with limitations. Where do boundaries lie here and now against our specific cultural background?