

# “Your Light Must Shine Before Others” (Mt 5:16): Faithful and Creative Disciples in a Wounded World

## Second Communal Reflection for SVD Lay Partners

### Introduction

Reflecting upon the call to live our missionary vocation in a wounded world, we find both hope and challenge in the theme “Your Light Must Shine Before Others’ (Mt 5:16): Faithful and Creative Disciples in a Wounded World.” As each General Chapter in the history of the SVD has invited us to deepen the understanding and integration of our identity, mission, charism, and spirituality, once again we find ourselves in a privileged moment of being invited to go deeper in our reflections on God’s activity among us as we respond to the feedback provided by the provinces/regions/missions (PRMs) and SVD lay partners based on the initial reflection guide and begin to identify some of the learnings and directives contained therein.

This Second Reflection Guide attempts to offer a synthesis of our previous reflections and create a space for the ongoing communal discernment of creative and innovative ways so we can go forward in carrying out our mission.

#### A SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR SHARING ONE

1. **Bible Sharing:** e.g. Mt: 5:13-16; Jn 8:12-20; 1 Jn 1:5-10
2. **Ritual:** Set in place the Bible and a big candle that is lit, – use an appropriate procedure to place them with prayers and hymns.
3. **Watch a video clip** on the theme of the 19<sup>th</sup> General Chapter.
4. **Sharing your reflections** based on the questions in sections 1 and 2.

### 1. “Your Light Must Shine Before Others” (Mt 5:16)

#### A. Scriptural Illuminations

The Gospel of Matthew, regarded as a *Glocal Gospel* (deeply rooted in the Jewish scriptures and traditions, yet more open to universal mission), announces the reality of God’s reign and its radical demands in the Sermon on the Mount, the first teaching discourse that serves as a compendium of missionary discipleship. The pivotal verse that guides our communal reflection and will orient the forthcoming Chapter, “Your light must shine before others so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (5:16) is part of a brief section, centered on the two metaphors of *salt* and *light* (5:13-16). The verse bridges the solemn beatitudes (5:3-12) and the heart of the inaugural discourse (5:17–7:12). The following are some insights emerging from reading this key verse that may help us reflect on our mission as faithful and creative disciples in a wounded world today.

Firstly, the metaphor of “light” – a common element of everyday life in the ancient world – defines the *identity* (“You are the light of the world;” 5:14) and *mission* of the disciples (“Your light must shine before others;” 5:16). Although “you” is emphatic and is addressed to all the followers in 5:14, a disciple’s identity as “light” refers back to Jesus whose life and mission are already introduced as a “great light” for the nations in 4:16 with a fulfillment quotation from Isa 9:1.

Secondly, “light” is presented as a *transformative* agent with a *missional* function (“Your light must shine”) signifying that mission is intrinsic to discipleship. Hence, every disciple is a transforming missionary disciple. But if his missional giftedness is hidden (5:14-15), he runs the risk of losing his transforming power.

Thirdly, the metaphors of “a city set on a hill”, “a lamp on a lampstand, giving light to *all*” and “light shining before people” reinforce the *universal* character of the mission, inviting the disciples to pass over from one’s local/particular context (Israel) to the universal one (all people) by sharing their light.

Fourthly, the enlightening “good works” are the concrete expressions of a liberating and life-giving mission of the disciples whose lifestyle becomes a testimony of the reign of God not by their *words* but by their *deeds*.

Fifthly, the disciples’ life and mission as light has an “interrelational” dimension as it shines forth from one’s living praxis to that of the others (*horizontal*) who are ultimately led to glorify the Father (*vertical*).

Finally, the movement from the *indicative* (“you are...”) to the *imperative* (“your light must shine...”) not only reiterates that the disciples already *are* light but also must be life-giving.

*1.1. How is the metaphor of “light” in the life and mission of lay partners relevant for ministering to a wounded world context today?*

*1.2. Does any other dimension of “light” guide you in your personal and community life? Share an experience with the group.*

## **B. *Missio Dei* and *Missio Lucis***

We recognize that the mission is God’s (*missio dei*) not ours. All our missionary activity springs from the mission of God and we as collaborators only participate in it. There are three key elements in Mt 5:16 which can illumine our understanding that God is the origin and goal of missionary discipleship as light (*missio lucis*).

a) *God as the Source of our Mission*: In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is the locus of God’s eternal presence among his people (Mt 1:23; 18:20; 28,20). In 5:16, this Emmanuel reveals that the ultimate goal of our life and mission as light is to give witness to God and enable the people to glorify him. It is the Father through his son Jesus who communicates to us our identity of being the “light” and invites us to model our life and mission after Jesus’ life and mission as the great light to the nations.

b) *As disciples, we are invited to participate in God’s mission*: As baptized persons, we receive our identity and vocation as light from God and are sent forth to share it with others. As a link between God and the peoples, we are called first to recognize the light of God and to be

transformed by this light in order to share it with others. We cannot evade our responsibility of being witnesses to the light we receive (Jn 8:12; 12:46). When our mission entails entering into dialogue with others, we lead others to give glory to God (5:16). Communicating light is communicating life.

*c) The wounded world as the locus of our healing mission:* In the commissioning of his disciples for the universal mission, Jesus sends them forth to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19-20). This final mission to the nations is already anticipated in 5:16 when the disciples are commanded to shine before people. For the church, the wounded world where the missionary God is at work is the privileged locus of bearing light before people. Despite our limitations, we can still make a positive impact and let the light of Christ shine through our presence among the people by our testimony of life and creative apostolates.

*1.3. What are the missional attitudes you need today to be effective collaborators in God's mission? How can you participate in God's mission?*

## **2. Arnold's Vision of Light: Looking for Inspiration from Our Founder**

### **A. Incarnate Word as the Light of the World**

The prologue of John's Gospel is central to Arnold's missionary spirituality. Our Founder believed with firm conviction that Christ, the Incarnate Word, is the light of the world: "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world" (John 1:9). This image of the light enlightening humanity has been passed on to Arnold's spiritual sons and daughters as articulated in the often-prayed invocation: "May the darkness of sin and the night of unbelief vanish before the Light of the Word and the Spirit of Grace."

*2.1. What are the spiritual insights you draw from your reading of the prologue of John's Gospel on Christ as the light of the world?*

### **B. Light amidst Shadows – Signs of Hope**

Saint Arnold's vision of the light of the world has its genesis in the existential historical reality of the *Kulturkampf* (the conflict between the German imperial government and the church from 1872 to 1886), a time of darkness and struggle. As the Society of the Divine Word grew over time, her members have witnessed God's love through periods of war, conflict, persecution, and even martyrdom. Even in this present age, when the world was brought to a standstill due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many confreres through their life and mission embraced hardships and death as a witness to God's redeeming love.

As we prepare to celebrate our 150 years of the foundation of the Society, these rays of light amidst shadows give hope to the Arnoldus Family to continue the legacy of our Founder who believed in the Incarnate Word as the light of the world.

*2.2. What are the signs of light that you experience in your group? What are possible creative spiritual practices you could organize among the lay group of partners to help you deepen your relationship with the Incarnate Word?*

### A SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR SHARING TWO

1. **Faith Sharing** (sharing my personal relationship and commitment to God): e.g. my woundedness and my faith journey.
2. **Ritual:** After setting in place the Bible and a big candle that is lit, each one brings a candle and lights it - use appropriate ways to place each one with prayers and hymns.
3. **Watch a video clip** on the theme of the 19<sup>th</sup> the General Chapter.
4. **Sharing your reflections** based on the questions in the sections 3 and 4.

### 3. Recognizing Our Woundedness

Just as our Founder experienced light and shadow in his time, so today we recognize wounds in our individual and communal lives, within SVD and lay partner groups and in the world at large. Echoing the PRMs and lay partners, we acknowledge that among us, these wounds include individualism, ethnocentrism, lack of trust and openness, lack of shared vision and planning, lack of communication, the presence of stereotypes and the inability to listen, the misuse of social media, the lack of transparency and accountability, mental health issues, the lack of effective leadership that results in abuse of power and so forth.

At the same time, we recognize that our brothers and sisters in many parts of the world are suffering from severe fragmentation in family life and are likewise afflicted by corruption, divisions, polarization, intolerance, secularization, insecurity, violence, the violation of human rights, racism, problems related to migration, the crisis of political systems, and fundamentalism. Aside from these, woundedness is almost manifest in our common home through a lack of care for nature, the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources, and mismanagement of waste.

Amidst these wounds, light still shines through. We find hope through our life-giving ministries such as accompanying migrants and indigenous peoples, caring for refugees, and collaborating with our lay partners and people of goodwill. What further encourages us to move forward is the strong and abiding faith we experience among the people we serve, gestures of solidarity and networking in civil society and with non-governmental organizations.

*3.1. What are the root causes of wounds that most affect your community life as lay partners? What are the ways to initiate the healing process?*

*3.2. How may we (SVDs and lay partners) in our conditions as “wounded healers,” sustain our missionary activities within situations of perpetual woundedness, ongoing injustices and sufferings? Suggest ways of healing.*

### 4. Being Faithful Disciples

Even as we recognize the many signs of woundedness in the world around us and in our own personal and communal lives, we find hope and seek to be hope for others in the effort to be faithful disciples

of Jesus Christ, continuing his mission of revealing to others the merciful love of the Father inspired by the example of our Founder. We grow in this fidelity through reflection upon and the continued deepening of our identity as lay missionaries, through a renewed emphasis on the importance of healthy community life, and through the effort to further enhance and strengthen our programs for both initial and ongoing formation of lay partners.

### **A. Our Missionary Identity**

What we find most enriching about our identity as Divine Word Missionaries includes our internationality and interculturality as well as our unique Spirituality which is at the same time both Incarnational and Trinitarian and which calls us to value and strengthen relationships within our Arnoldus Family, especially with the SVD lay partners. As emphasized in our 18<sup>th</sup> SVD General Chapter, 2018 (GC), which proclaimed that “Our name is our mission,” we seek to continue deepening our awareness of the need to root ourselves in the Word in all aspects of our shared life and mission so as to strengthen our testimony to that Word among ourselves and those with whom we dialogue.

As faithful disciples, we recognize the need to further appropriate commitment to mission as essential to our identity and the foundation from which we engage in reading the signs of the times to give shape and context to our service through the Characteristic Dimensions and a diversity of approaches and apostolates.

*4.1. What are the elements of the identity of SVD lay partners that strengthen you to transcend the individualism widely recognized across various groups?*

*4.2. Are there other aspects that you see as being additional Characteristic Dimensions we need to embrace now and in the years to come? Why?*

### **B. Our Community Life**

We recognize that the pandemic has contributed to a weakening and fracturing of our community living. Among the challenges facing our fragile fraternal life are the difficulty of creating spaces for encountering, listening to, and dialoguing with one another; deepening a sense of belonging and inclusion; moving from self-centeredness and self-interest to mutual dialogue; growing beyond multiculturalism toward genuine intercultural living; and owning the importance of teamwork and shared responsibility as well as greater accountability and financial transparency.

*4.3. What are some ways and methods by which you can grow beyond multiculturalism toward genuine intercultural living?*

*4.4. In what ways and by what methods can you faithfully commit to transparent accountability in your use and administration of temporal goods?*

### **C. Initial Formation**

Initial formation is an aspect that has been present since the call of the first disciples and their journey together with Jesus. Being faithful disciples, we strongly emphasize the need to identify and provide appropriate training for members of the Society and lay partners to serve as formators. Along the same line, we strengthen our fidelity by fortifying the promotion of new members and by creating spaces for formators and lay partners to collaborate toward promoting the continued growth and health of lay partner groups.

Strengthening our missionary formation includes the appropriate psychological evaluation of candidates, skill formation for intercultural life and mission, language learning, and integration of the spiritual, human, intellectual, and pastoral dimensions. In addition, given the Digital Era in which we live and serve, due attention needs to be given to our new members in the effective and responsible use of digital and social media. Given the challenges and realities in our mission, we shall acknowledge the importance of preparing our new members to be faithful disciples with the spirit of sacrifice and self-giving (see GC 2018, #38).

*4.5. How can you prepare your candidates and lay formators to become faithful and creative disciples? How can the lay partners help the formation of SVDs?*

#### **D. Ongoing Formation**

All members of the group of lay partners need and are responsible for pursuing ongoing formation both individually and collectively. In line with the vision of our Founder, animators, spiritual directors and leaders in the group have a specific responsibility to foster and cultivate opportunities for the members to undertake their ongoing personal growth in areas which correspond not only to personal needs and interests but to the needs of the group of lay partners and those whom we serve. This responsibility includes follow-up and evaluation as well as enhancing wider participation in programs for ongoing formation.

*4.6. In what ways and by what methods are you currently pursuing opportunities for your ongoing personal and ministerial growth? How to improve this?*

### A SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR SHARING THREE

1. **Life Sharing** (sharing my experience of Christian living): e.g., my experience of creative ministry; my experience with other lay partners.
2. **Ritual:** After setting in place the Bible and a big candle that is lit, each individual's candle is lit and placed around them, and a ritual blessing and renewal of religious commitment is done to grow as faithful disciples - use appropriate prayers and hymns.
3. **Watch a video clip** on the theme of the 19<sup>th</sup> General Chapter.
4. **Sharing your reflections** based on the questions in sections 5 and 6.

## 5. Becoming Creative Missionaries

Recognizing the woundedness within and around us, we become all the more aware of our urgent call to become signs of hope and the source of healing for our wounded world by embracing appropriate methods for doing creative mission.

### A. Appropriate Methods for Doing Creative Mission

In light of the last SVD General Chapter, the Society has already adopted two primary ways of doing mission. The first way involves five steps which are See – Judge – Act – Evaluate – Celebrate (2018 GC Statement, Appendix, Method 1). The other way likewise comprises the five elements: Contextual Reality – Experience – Discernment – Commitment – Renewal (Ibid, Method 2). In the present ecclesial context, the universal church embraces the Synodal way of being church which includes Communion, Participation and Mission guided by the two principles of listening and accompanying.

Together with the members of the Arnoldus Family, this synodal method offers us an opportunity to journey with all of humanity including people of other denominations and faith traditions by being truly present and involved in their real-life situations, sharing their joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties (*Gaudium et Spes* 1).

*5.1. In what aspects can your network with the SVDs and other lay partners groups be improved and how?*

### B. Creative Missionary Response

Our creative missionary response is first and foremost one that focuses on promoting healing to restore the dignity of life and the integrity of social order. Special attention should be given to those who feel denied their rights to fully participate in society, those who are rendered to the margins due to any form of discrimination and violence, and those who are forced to the least advantageous position in a polarized society including women, the elderly, youth, indigenous people, migrants, LGBTQ, “the nones,” and others. Our missionary service aims to be integral focusing on spiritual guidance and socio-economic assistance.

5.2. *How can your ministries creatively respond to the pervasive realities of discrimination and polarization in a synodal way that invites active participation, promotes self-empowerment, and leads to liberation?*

5.3. *What are the innovative ways worth exploring to improve the quality of your youth ministry and respond effectively to the fragmentation in family life?*

5.4. *How can the leadership in your group promote creative ministries?*

### **C. Creative Digital Response**

We benefit from the advancement of digital technology in carrying out our mission (GC 2018, # 46). However, more efforts are needed for an effective use of digital technology prioritizing: a) fostering digital media education to strengthen our digital media literacy; b) enhancing collaboration among the existing communication centers focusing on sharing resources, creating common platforms, and arranging projects related to digital ministry; c) involving lay professionals for the production of quality content.

5.5. *What are the concrete programs you could organize to foster digital and social media for your initial formation and ongoing formation? What structures of accountability need to be in place to insure the responsible use of digital and social media in respect to the group of lay partners?*

5.6. *What are specific ways that you can utilize digital and social media to extend the reach of evangelization in your respective groups?*

### **D. Creative Ecological Response**

We acknowledge that the stewardship of creation is part of our missionary responsibility (GC 2018, #44) inspired by the integral ecology of *Laudato Si*. Still more concrete actions are needed to protect our common home including: a) promoting eco-spirituality and participation in activities organized as part of the JPIC ministry (*Laudato Si* Action Platform); b) advocating for ecological justice and systemic change involving a broader network of collaboration with relevant stakeholders; c) encouraging an eco-friendly personal lifestyle in our communities and seeking concrete ways to support ecological sustainability.

5.7. *How can you promote eco-spirituality in your home, communities and in your ministries?*

5.8. *Which changes in your lifestyle do you need to achieve ecological sustainability in your home and community?*

5.9. *What are the concrete ways by which you could restore biodiversity amidst the challenge of the extinction of many species in your context?*

## **6. Lay Partners**

We, the SVDs and the lay partners, are committed to engaging creatively in the process of healing the wounded world. The 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> General Chapters proposed creating clearer and more effective collaboration with them in mission (GC 2018, # 49). There have been positive developments in the implementation of the Chapters' directives. However, as the reports suggest, in some PRM, there has been a lack of interest and even a level of resistance. In order to strengthen the collaboration of SVDs and lay partners, focus is needed in the areas of promotion of the lay groups, formation, and recognizing all the members as missionary companions on our common journey.

Concrete steps of the SVDs in the direction of enhancing our collaboration could include:

- Stressing the responsibility of the mission secretaries of all PRMs for the promotion and formation of the lay partner groups/associates involving the collaboration of individual confreres and communities.
- Appointing coordinators or spiritual directors to accompany the lay partners in their outreach programs.
- Making more conscious efforts to engage with SVDs in respective ministries utilizing the talents and expertise of lay partners.
- Assist in creating a manual for the formation of the lay partners in each PRM/sub-zone.
- Developing a formation program for lay partners focusing on the Bible, SVD spirituality, charism, four Characteristic Dimensions, Dei Verbum course, interculturality, etc.
- Participation of the lay partners in the SVD meetings, assemblies, retreats, recollections, prayers, devotions, feast day celebrations, and pilgrimages.
- Fostering a Network for the lay partners to share among themselves, know one another, and provide the SVDs feedback to enlighten and strengthen the missionary activities.

*6.1. What are some innovative ways in which you could reach out to potential members, especially the young members, in your respective ministries by way of Arnoldus spirituality and charism?*

*6.2. What are opportunities you could create for initiating and deepening encounters and mutual listening with the wider SVD community? How could you achieve the same within and among the lay partners in the PRM/sub-zone?*

## **Conclusion**

Being faithful disciples and becoming creative missionaries is an ongoing process. We experience woundedness within us and around us, and yet we find rays of hope in journeying together with our lay partners, SSpS and SSpSAP as members of the Arnoldus Family. As we continue preparing for the 19<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, we seek to make our communities places of reflective prayer, mutual listening, and dialogue where we continue growing as faithful disciples and creative missionaries.

*“Your Light Must Shine” ... and shine we must!*