

An Overview of the CPPS Today

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Workshop for Newly Incorporated Members – July 10, 2005

My topic is rather an unwieldy one for a short presentation. How does one present a picture of the CPPS today in a relatively brief presentation? The task is, of course, quite impossible, but one can make an attempt to select some dimensions of our life that can give some sense of the rich mosaic that is the Congregation today. Keeping in mind the limitations of a presentation like this, I will try to do three things this afternoon: 1) give you some facts and figures that I think are useful in understanding where we are now and what our future might hold; 2) offer some of my interpretations of the data and some possible implications for the future; and 3) offer a summary of some recent research on priests in the United States that I think may resonate with your experience. I realize that not all of you are ordained nor do you come from North America, but I believe that at least some of this material may be relevant to you. This last section may appear to be somewhat off the topic, but I believe that the content may describe some of the issues facing us throughout the world. The last section does, I submit, form part of the picture of the CPPS today. I hope in a special way that the material in the third section will stimulate reflection and dialogue among all of us during our week together.

1. THE FACTS

Had there been a workshop of this kind when I was a newly ordained member of the Congregation in 1972, this presentation and indeed this workshop would have been quite different.

For one thing, we were a larger congregation then: 767 members. We have 526 members today. It was a time of great – and sometimes wrenching – change: the number of members had dropped from a high of 903 in 1965 to 767 in 1972. More than half of that decline was due to the departure of 78 members from the Congregation. In other words, in 7 years we lost nearly 9% of our members through departure.

The principal languages spoken would have been English, Italian, and German; there were few native Spanish-speaking members then. There would have been no Africans, Poles, Indians, Peruvians, or Guatemalans among the participants.

There have been many changes over the years: we are now smaller and at the same time more diverse in language and in culture. We have grown older and fewer in North America and in Europe. The growth in the CPPS has been and probably will be mainly in the south for the foreseeable future. There have been rather abundant vocations in Tanzania and India, and now Latin America is also seeing growth in candidates as well.

In the last few years we have witnessed the beginning of some promising new ventures in Guinea Bissau, Vietnam, and Colombia. There are two Tanzanians, a Spaniard, and a Portuguese working together in Guinea Bissau. Two native Vietnamese priests from the Kansas City Province are working secretly in Vietnam and there are now 4 “pledged candidates” (equivalent to temporary incorporation) in Vietnam. A member of the Chilean Vicariate and a North American of the Peruvian Mission have initiated an experimental mission in Colombia, which is sponsored by the Peruvian Mission. As of May 1 we have a new Polish Province, and as of July 1 the Province of the Pacific in the United States has ceased to exist. There are now CPPS members and candidates in 20 countries throughout the world.

Current Membership Data

We currently have 526 definitively incorporated members in the Congregation. This includes students, brothers, priests, and bishops. *Chart 1* of your handouts shows the numbers and a pie chart that helps to visualize the distribution of members among the provinces. *Table 6* on the third page shows the same data, but in table form.

A quick glance at these figures shows that North America and Europe still account for a large percentage of members, although Tanzania and India, both young foundations who have had native-born members (definitively incorporated) for only about 15 years, have nearly 50 members each. Guatemala, Perú, and Chile have also added native-born members to their ranks, although a few North Americans continue to work in those countries.

Chart 2 shows a breakdown of members by their status—student, brother, or priest. It is interesting to see that the Cincinnati Province has the largest number of brothers by far. At present there seems to be a renewed interest this vocation in the USA: the most recent definitive incorporation was of a brother, and several current candidates wish to become brothers as well. Next year, by the way, there will be a symposium on the role of brothers

that will be held in the United States. This symposium grew out of a resolution of the last General Assembly.

Turning to *Chart 3* we see a graphic illustration of the median ages of the members in each unit of the CPPS. The median is the middle age, not the arithmetic average or mean, and it gives a figure that is not affected by extremes at either end of the range. One notices immediately that the provinces of the United States and Europe (with the exception of Poland) have a much higher median age among their members. Thus while Cincinnati has the largest number of members, half of them are 68 years old or older. In Poland, by contrast, the oldest member is 45, and the median age of Indian members is nearly half that of the congregation, which has held steady at 57 for several years.

One significant piece of data that the chart does not show is the distribution of the members of various ages. There are some units with relatively few (or no) members in their twenties or thirties, with more members in their forties or fifties. The distribution of ages is of importance as well as the median age, since it might be that members who find few other members in their age cohort, or group of members of the same age, may experience some challenges that would not face those who have a number of members of more or less the same age.

One thinks, for example, of my province, Cincinnati, where there are only five members under the age of forty, whereas India has only six members *over* the age of 40. Cincinnati has 14 members in their forties and 32 members in their fifties. This is probably not too unusual for a North American religious congregation of men, but it surely must be quite different from what we would have seen 40 years ago. Such an age distribution presents some unique problems – or challenges if you will – to members of religious congregations today.

While predicting the future is always a risky business, I would say that if present trends continue, the median age in the three North American provinces and in the European provinces, with the exception of Poland, will probably increase or at least remain the same. My guess is that the median age of members in Latin America will remain the same or will decrease, given the candidates who are now in formation, although Brazil may be an exception. The growth in Tanzania will continue, although probably at a slower pace and so

the median age may not change all that much. India, of course, with its significant growth, should continue to be a young unit of the Congregation.

Chart 4 gives a graphic look at the way our members are distributed by region. North America dominates in number of members, with more than one and a half times the members in Africa, Asia, and Latin America combined. Remember, of course, that North America has a higher percentage of older members and proportionately fewer candidates than those other regions.

Chart 5 shows the distribution of *members and candidates by region*. For the purpose of this chart I am using statistics for candidates at all levels of formation, not just incorporated students. Note that there is an inverse relationship between members and candidates: those regions with more members have proportionately fewer candidates than those with fewer members. North America and Europe have many members but few candidates. Africa, Asia, and Latin America all have under 50 members but have larger numbers of candidates. This is in line with the experience of other religious congregations as well.

WHAT THE STATISTICS MEAN

Internationality will continue to be a characteristic of our Congregation, our Church, and our world. In June I was in the Teutonic Province for their annual assembly in Kufstein. I learned that there in the traditionally Catholic Tyrol that there were now three mosques as well as three Catholic churches in town. Some 55 nationalities are represented in Kufstein, and among the members and ASC sisters in the house there were 5 nationalities among 6 people! In the Diocese of Augsburg in Germany, 90 of the 400 diocesan priests are Indian.

As some of you may know, next month three of our Indian members will be going to work in the Teutonic Province. They are obviously not the first Asian clergy to come to work in Europe. Presently three members of the Tanzanian Vicariate are working in Chile and three members of the Vicariate have taken over the care of the Sanctuary in Ferrara. Brazil is also an international community: among the 9 members there, one is a native Brazilian, two are from Spain, 3 from Austria, 2 from Germany, and 1 from Guatemala. At the Casa Central in Santiago de Chile, there are 2 Chileans, 1 Peruvian, and 3 Mexican candidates living with 3 priests: a Chilean, a North American, and a Pole.

Such internationality is nothing new among religious congregations, of course, and any number of such communities would report similar stories. We are, of course, only a microcosm of the society at large, which has become increasingly mobile, international, globalized. While it is obvious that international living and ministry has already proved successful in the CPPS, that is not to say that there are no problems. Understanding the culture of another and learning to live in that culture can be very challenging. I know from my own experience that moving to another country and culture to live can be difficult if at the same time rewarding.

As those who study the phenomenon of globalization point out, one of the paradoxical but understandable consequences of this trend has also been an intensification of a sense of nationalism and a desire to preserve one's own cultural identity. Europe, while needing immigrants for their work force in the light of diminishing birthrates, has also seen a marked decline in openness to foreigners, especially to those from non-Western cultures. Despite misgivings about immigration in some countries recently, immigration is a fact of life that will not disappear. Our world as well as our Congregation will be increasing "internationalized."

As CPPS, our challenge will be to continue to build on the successful international communities we already have and continue to promote such collaboration actively and in an effective manner. We have an opportunity to be examples to others of how people from different cultures can live and work together.

What might we want to do to prepare ourselves for an increasingly international Congregation and world? The study of other languages and cultures is very important. Already many in the Congregation can speak two or three or even more languages. In Europe, one article I have read suggests that about 50% of the population speaks another language. In the United States it is something like 10%. (It is interesting in this regard that a few years ago only about one in five US citizens had passports.)

It is likely that English will continue to be the international language not only in the area of business and academics but also in our Congregation as well. About 70% of our members speak English as a first or second language. I would think that it would be important for all members to have a basic grasp of English and for those of us whose first

language is English to learn another language spoken in the Congregation or one useful to us in our ministry.

We will also want to be sure we are well prepared for international living and ministry by using or developing programs to help members to understand and live in another culture. It will be important for us to realize that there are a variety of ways of being CPPS. We have in the words of Paul to the Romans, “gifts that differ according to the grace given to us” (Rm 12, 6). Community life, mission, and spirituality take different forms for historical and cultural reasons, and we should not be too quick to judge their adequacy based on our own cultural lens or perspective.

Distribution of Resources – Human and Economic

As we become more international and less concerned about “boundaries” and as the number of members diminishes and ages in some units of our Congregation, it will be natural to look to areas with more abundant vocations for help. In fact, this is hardly new. After all, the CPPS came to the United States because of the great need for priests and religious to work in the new republic. Until fairly recently, Ireland used to “export” priests, brothers, and sisters to work in the United States.

Clearly there are personnel needs and there is a generous willingness on the part of many members to leave their country to serve in another. At the same time, we must be cautious at looking to such arrangements as quick and easy solutions to problems that might be addressed in other ways. A careful balancing of needs, values, and consequences must be part of any discussion and planning for members to leave their province, vicariate, or mission, to work in another.

I am sure that as I described the distribution of the members among countries and regions, many of you were probably also thinking about the distribution of economic resources among those areas.

We do not have precise data to show the distribution of economic resources among the various units of the Congregation, but it would be safe to say that Europe and North America in general are wealthier. These areas of the CPPS have also shared their wealth with newer units and/or those who have greater need. There has already been discussion of how

to share those resources more equitably in recent years, for example, at the major superiors' meeting in 2002 and in the last General Assembly.

This is not so easy for us because we do not have a centralized economic system as some religious congregations do. Decisions to share resources are made on a province by province basis and, while such sharing has been generous, it has not been discussed or coordinated on congregation-wide level. This is beginning to happen now, however.

At the same time, Europe and North America are growing older and smaller in membership. In this process two things occur: older members will probably need more of the financial resources of a province for their care, and, with fewer members earning salaries, income will diminish. It may well be that current levels of economic sharing may not be sustainable.

While this is a sensitive subject, there is also a disparity in the level of support that various units of the Congregation receive. Part of this reflects the relative wealth of a province and part of it reflects different models of mission. I believe that this is an issue that ought to be discussed. I think that it would be healthy to discuss the sharing of resources in the light of a shared theology of mission, for example, so that our resources might be allocated more equitably.

One might add that there will probably be other worthwhile activities competing for funds. There is talk of an international center for Precious Blood spirituality, interregional and international formation programs, more collaboration in regions, and so forth. All of these very valuable projects will require funding for personnel, programs, travel, and so forth. Will the pool of money grow, remain stable, or diminish?

Ageing

As a member who is now nearly two years above the median age of a CPPS member (but still 10 years below the median age of my province), the issue of ageing is becoming more real to me every day.

An ageing population is not unique to our Congregation or to religious communities in general. The most economically prosperous countries in the world are generally experiencing declining birth rates and longer life spans. This means populations that are "top heavy" with older people.

There are several consequences of this. In some countries, there already exists a shortage of workers, at least in certain areas. As I mentioned earlier, immigrants are needed to close the gap, but are often resented because they do not “fit in” or are seen as taking jobs from native workers. There are also fewer younger people to support the older generations, and we are already seeing crises facing social programs that provide pensions and medical care for the elderly.

What does this mean for our Congregation? Apart from the economic consequences that I mentioned earlier, it also means that there will be less energy available to undertake new ventures. Even though many of our members are living longer and healthier lives and are sometimes working well into their eighties or even nineties, I think it would safe to say that older people in general are less likely to have the energy and/or interest in innovating and going in new directions. There certainly will be exceptions to this, but I suspect that this observation generally holds true. Older members will probably be more concerned with such issues of security and the handing on of tradition than with dreaming new dreams or breaking new ground.

At the same time, there is evidence that in some areas, and the United States is a prime example, that younger members have somewhat different models of community life and ministry and of their role in the Church. Older members may see themselves as more “progressive” and less “traditional” in their outlook than younger members. My generation, for example, grew up in the church before Vatican II. The Council was in progress during my late teen years and the reforms were beginning as I was a young member and priest. For some of us, certain ideas and practices are symbols of an “old church” that we no longer believe in, whether these ideas and practices really mean the same thing to those who advocate them today. This is a phenomenon that is worth taking note of.

In the future there will be fewer young members to shoulder the tasks of the Congregation in places like North America and parts of Europe. In some cases younger members may feel the pressure of taking on existing commitments in the apostolate with the decline in numbers available to staff them. While there is certainly a value to being faithful to commitments made in the name of the Congregation, there is a danger of viewing current commitments as “slots to be filled.” Many of us remember that, even in days of the relative

abundance of members, some of our fellow members were more or less coerced to engage in apostolates for which they were ill-suited.

A certain amount of tension is going to be inevitable. Old and young will have to be deliberate in learning to live together and older members will have to take care not to dominate the younger, to let go and to trust. If we can do this, we have the opportunity for being a model to the societies that are facing these same challenges. Our way of life, our communities, can be models for societies which will be facing these same issues in not so many years.

I realize that for some of you here this sounds like a strange and remote situation. Recent projections (cf. *The Atlantic*, July-August 2005, p. 47) suggest that by the year 2050 the percentage of the population over 65 will be approximately 20% in Asia and Latin America, about the same as that of North America. (The figure for Europe will be about 30%. Sub-Saharan Africa will double its percentage to about 5%.) Regardless of the figures for your area, I believe that all of you will be affected by ageing in some way, at least indirectly, so I call your attention to it in this presentation.

The Statistics We Did Not See: The Laity

I did not include statistics on lay associates in the first part of this presentation and that is partly because we have a variety of such associations in the CPPS and we do not have current statistics at the generalate. There are significant differences among these groups as well, making comparisons somewhat difficult. I think it is time for us to start including lay associates as part of the annual report that each province, vicariate, or mission is supposed to make to the General Curia each year.

One of the great blessings we have experienced in a number of areas of the CPPS is the growth in the numbers of these lay associates. As we deepen our understanding of the charism of the Congregation and of the spirituality of the Blood of Christ, it is only natural that we want to share this “good news” with others. We have a long history of such ministry with laymen and laywomen, dating back to the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood, which Albertini began seven years before the founding of the Congregation. Of course, we know that Gaspar himself established various associations for the laity in his ministry as well.

It is interesting to me that the invitation for us to consider founding a new mission in Colombia came not from a bishop but from a priest and an association of lay people who recognized the need for a spirituality of reconciliation in their country. There it is the laity, with the guidance of Fr. Humberto Silva, who are ministering to us, as it were, and helping us to inaugurate our presence in Colombia.

This reminds us that it is not only we who have something to give to the laity, but that they have something to give to us as well. Those of us who have experienced having lay associates as part of the life of our province, vicariate, or mission, know that we have received much from these people who want to share our spirituality, and in some cases, aspects of our community life and ministry.

One of the challenges in working with the laity might be overcoming cultural understandings of the relationship between members of religious communities or priests and the laity. Our experience of lay associates or Companions in the United States is that many of them wish to collaborate *with* us, not simply work *under* us. They come to us with enthusiasm, knowledge, skills, and dedication and want to share our spirituality and our mission.

In times when some of our units are experiencing a shortage of members it is tempting to see lay people as an answer to that shortage. In some ways, the decline in membership has been a stimulus for developing lay associates and certainly in the Church today the shortage of clergy has given impetus to more widespread lay ministry. It would be a mistake, however, to view the laity simply as resources that substitute for our members.

Rather, we should recognize that many laymen and women today are attracted to our spirituality because it is truly a response to the signs of the times. Some want only a “spiritual” relationship, to be sure, but others seek to be a part of our missionary apostolate as well. We have made a good beginning but I believe that we still have much to do in this regard.

3. RECENT RESEARCH ON PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS

The final section of my presentation will be a brief summary of some research that has been done on priests in the United States in the past few years. I realize that such research is bound to be linked to North American culture and that it is research about *priests*,

and not religious brothers, but I suspect that there is material worth considering even given these limitations.

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., has conducted surveys of priests over the years, the latest for which I have found data being in 2002. Their research shows that in general priests are satisfied and happy in their work, although ten percent say that they have “seriously thought about leaving the priesthood in the past five years.” I view that as a very significant finding – 1 in 10 priests considers leaving the priesthood in a five-year period!

The major findings of their study are organized around two areas: **work load** and **support structures**. It is worthwhile to consider what the research has to say about these areas. While the research was done with priests, I am confident that brothers would have the same kinds of experience.

Many priests (40%) report working more than 60 hours a week and about 20% work more than 80 hours a week. Three-quarters report being on call 24 hours a day. About 25% say they are too busy to meet the needs of the people they serve adequately. About 75% of parish priests would like to spend less time in administrative and supervisory tasks.

Research by Hoge and Wenger (2003) confirms this, noting that 17% of all priests consider “too much work” a significant problem, along with about 13% who find “unrealistic demands and expectations of lay people” a problem. 43% want the issue of overwork to be openly discussed. One of the recommendations made by the priests in their study was to provide clear guidelines for setting healthy limits by priests and another was to separate work space from living space.

What is particularly significant about this research is that the CARA priests are more likely to say they have thought seriously about leaving the priesthood if they feel too busy to pray, to meet the pastoral needs of the people, or if they prefer less administrative work.

What this suggests to me is that in today’s world it is easy to be overwhelmed by work and to work too much. The need to have a balance in one’s life is important, a statement we all agree with but one that is easier to make than to put into action.

Support structures in the CARA study include prayer, support groups, and friends. More than 80% made a retreat in the past year, about 70% schedule days of prayer or reflection for themselves, and about half have a spiritual director. One of the

recommendations made by priests as documented in the studies of Hoge and Wenger is more focus on spiritual development and the importance of prayer in seminary training and for bishops to encourage prayer and the use of spiritual directors.

One interesting finding is that priests who have close friends who are priests are less likely to have considered leaving the priesthood in the past five years than those with few friends who are priests. One of the recommendations made by priests to their bishops in the Hoge and Wenger study was to “combat loneliness by fostering priestly fraternity.” Again, this is a finding that is not surprising and one which we, as members of a religious congregation, ought to be putting into practice. We should be fostering such fraternity among our members as well.

Personal Development was not a theme that received much treatment (at least directly) in the CARA study, but it received more attention in Hoge and Wenger. Celibacy and loneliness were reported as significant problems affecting priests, noted by 13% and 11% of respondents respectively.

About 50% want the psychosexual maturity of priests to be discussed, along with the same percentage wanting discussion of support for living the celibate life. The problems of sexual misconduct also rated a 42% response. About 30% want problems of rectory or community living to be talked about.

These are topics that are often difficult to talk about for a variety of reasons, but they are certainly vital questions and it would be especially important for there to be good feedback to our members in formation ministry about the adequacy of formation programs in addressing these issues.

Authority was mentioned as the number one problem facing priests, with 24% of priests responding that “the way authority is exercised in the Church” is a great problem to them personally on a day-to-day basis. An interesting finding and one that is slightly puzzling, was that only 7% noted that “relationships with superiors or pastor” were a significant problem for them.

Authority is a difficult issue, given that it is partly culturally determined, but our Normative Texts state:

Authority is a necessary support of the community...The function of authority is to unite the individual members into a single community. The Directors of the Society

are to reconcile conflicting spirits and to keep the members faithful to the ideals of the community... (NT C46, 47)

I am not sure how you understand authority in the Church in general and in your province, vicariate, or mission in particular, but perhaps the opportunity to discuss this issue will arise at least informally during the course of the workshop.

Community Life. The Hoge and Wenger study notes that 32 % of priests want to discuss “problems of rectory or community living.” This topic is the tenth on a list of issues priests want discussed. However, it is certainly related to other issues higher up on the same list, such as the psychosexual maturity of priests, support for living the celibate life, and problems of overwork.

This is a topic that will be covered in a presentation later this week, so I will just mention this finding in my talk this afternoon.

Recommendations of priests.

So, what recommendations have priests made to seminaries and to their bishops?

They have asked the seminaries to focus more on spiritual development and the importance of prayer as well as providing practical preparation for parish life.

Of bishops they ask that work space and living space be separated. Many priests do not like “living above the store” and want their private life separated from their work. They want bishops to foster fraternity, especially in living situations. They want clear guidelines for setting limits and support for hiring more lay staff. They want bishops to encourage prayer and the use of spiritual directors.

Excursus: Those Who Have Left

One of the painful realities that face all of us, but especially the younger members, I believe, is the number of our confreres who have left our Congregation. Between 1990 and 2005, 33 members have been given official permission to leave the Society. Some have gone on to minister as priests in a diocese, but others have simply left. During that same time period 4 members were dismissed from the Congregation, a procedure that is taken only as a last resort, after having tried other ways of dealing with a member who has problems or who

has left without seeking proper authorization. Earlier this year a young member contracted a civil marriage and thus automatically lost his membership in the Congregation.

These departures are painful for us. We wonder about what happened in their lives, what went wrong. Did we as a Congregation fail them in some way? Why did they choose to leave us, some after only a very short time in the Society?

There are no easy answers to these questions. It would be simplistic to say that they were all immature or irresponsible or did not handle their problems well. It would be equally simplistic to blame a formation program or leadership in the Congregation for their departures. Rather than blaming, we might ask ourselves what we can learn from them. If we as CPPS members have in any way contributed to their decision to leave, how can we do better at being supportive, caring, and affirming, for example? How can we work together to create a community atmosphere where each person is valued and can have the opportunity to experience satisfaction and happiness? How can we support those who struggle with personal issues, how can we respond to their needs?

Certainly we can not eliminate departures from the Congregation entirely, but I believe that we need to listen to the stories of those who have left us and learn from them. The Union of Superiors General will be taking up this issue in one of their future meetings, so it is a question for many other congregations as well.

Conclusion

I realize that this presentation contains a great deal of material, perhaps too much, and it may be that you will not be able to digest it all at once. I hope that I have given you an overall view of the Congregation, at least from a statistical point of view. I hope that I have raised some questions about the meaning of this data for the present and the future. Finally, I hope that I have presented a few questions based on recent research on priests to stimulate honest reflection and conversations during the coming week.

I am aware that my presentation did not touch some areas of interest and concern, but I trust that these will be covered in other presentations and that you will be able to discuss these issues in both formal and casual conversation during this week.

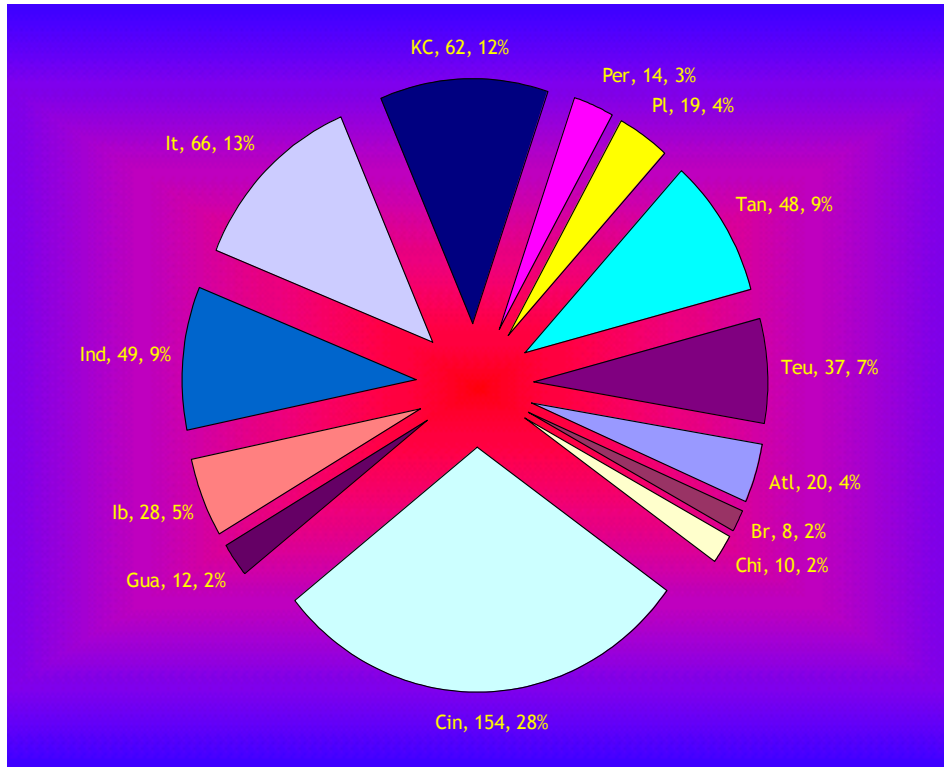


Chart 1: CPPS Members by Unit

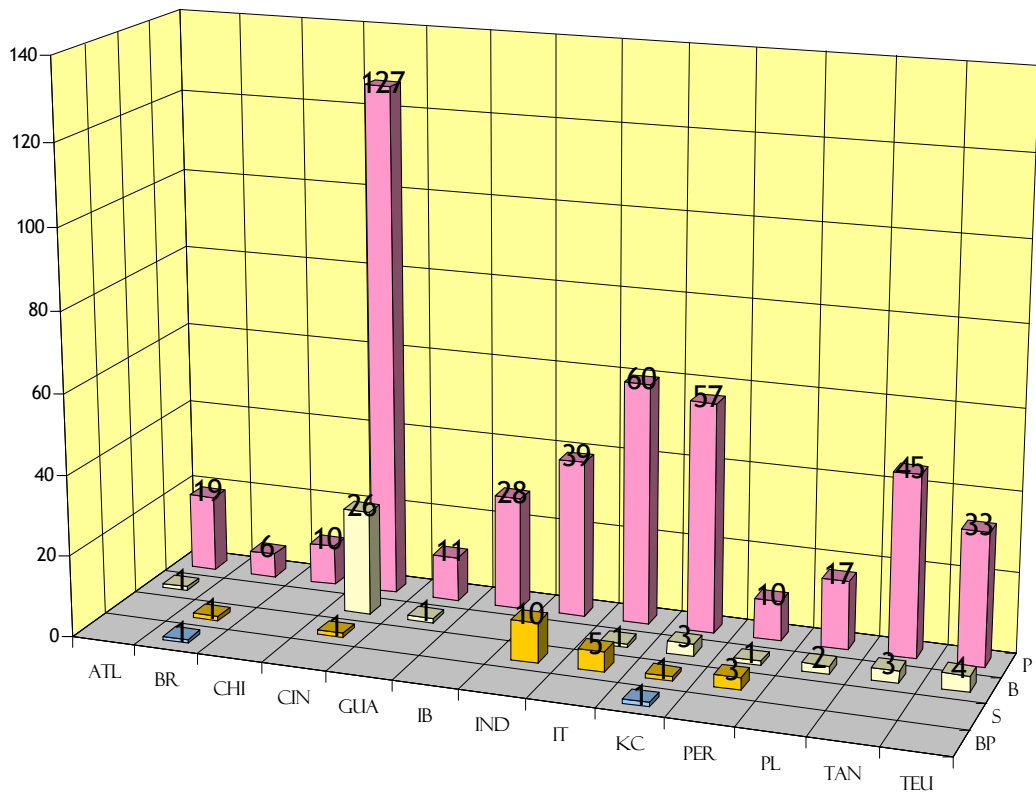


Chart 2: CPPS Members by Status and Unit

B=brother

Bp=bishop

P=priest

S=candidate (definitively incorporated)

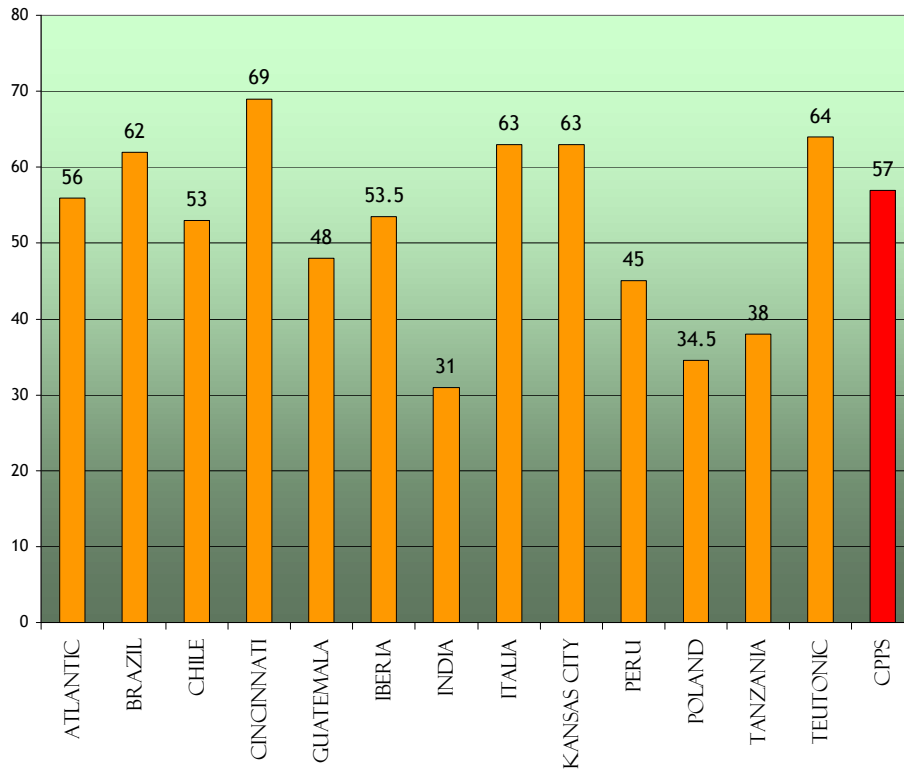


Chart 3: Median Ages of CPPS Members by Unit

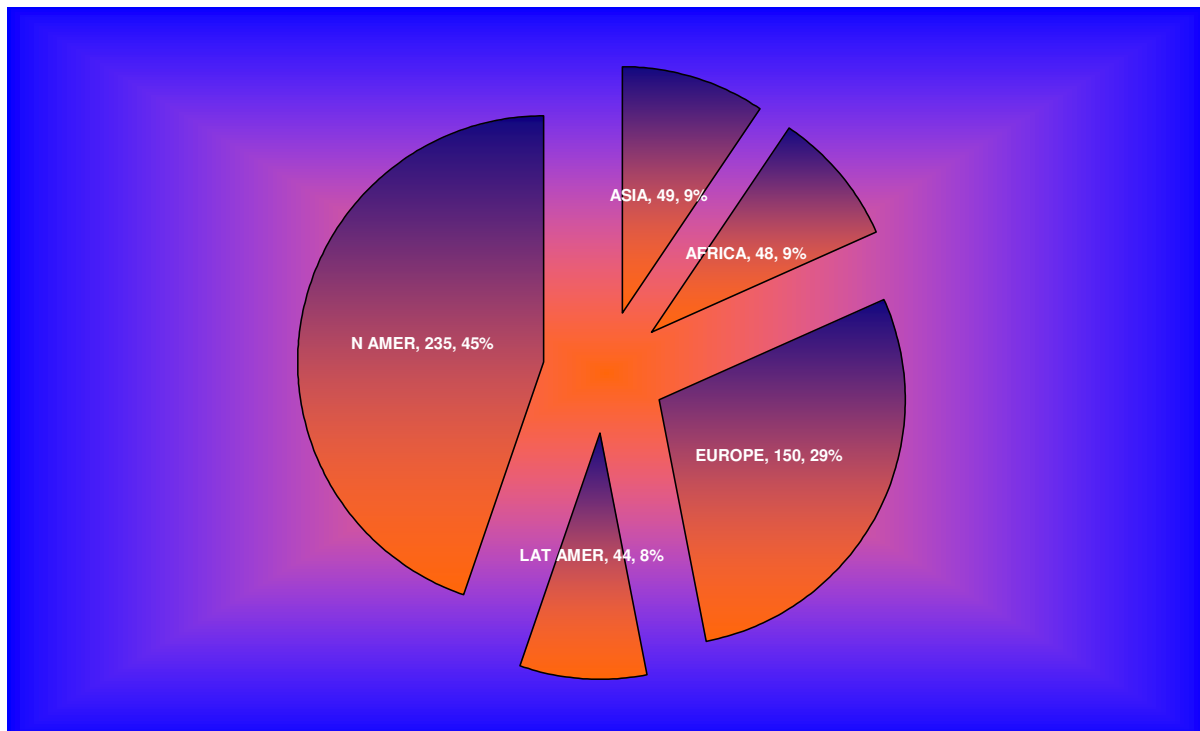


Chart 4: CPPS Members by Region

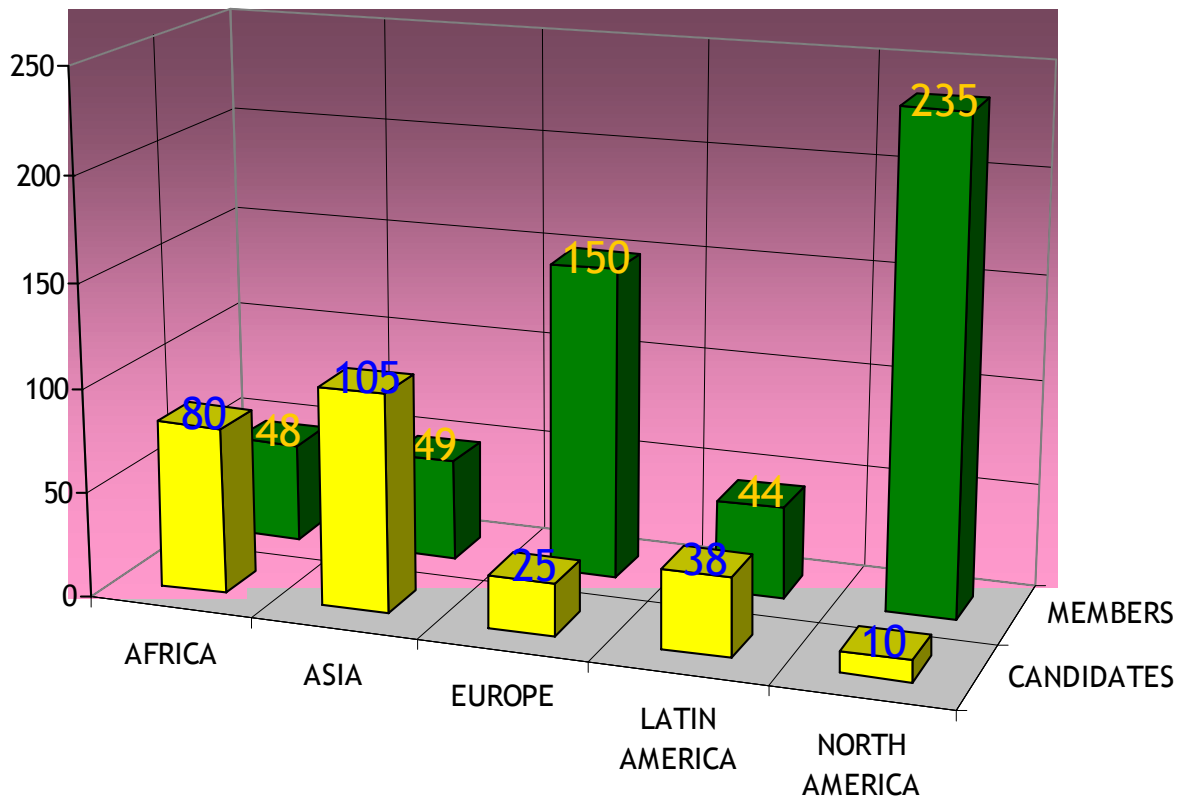


Chart 5: Members and Candidates by Region

Count of Status	Status				
Unit CPPS	B	Bp	P	S	Grand Total
Atl	1		19		20
Br		1	6	1	8
Chi			10		10
Cin	26		127	1	154
Gua	1		11		12
Ib			28		28
Ind			39	10	49
It	1		60	5	66
KC	3	1	58		62
Per	1		10	3	14
Pl	2		17		19
Tan	3		45		48
Teu	4		33		37
Grand Total	42	2	463	20	527

Table 6: CPPS Members by Province and Status

B=brother Bp=bishop P=priest S=candidate (definitively incorporated)

Questions for Discussion

The following are meant only as suggestions. Each group should feel free to discuss what seems most relevant to the members of that group.

1. How have you experienced the internationality and multiculturalism of the CPPS? What directions would you like to see this trend take?
2. What other themes from the second section of the presentation seem to be most relevant to your life right now? (ageing membership, distribution of resources, lay associates) How have any of these affected you, and how have you responded to them personally and/or at the local level?
3. Were there some themes in the third section (work load, support structures, personal development, authority, community life) that seem especially relevant to your life?
4. Do you know any members who have left the Congregation? What happened in their lives? Could we have responded to their situation in a better way?
5. What do you think the Congregation will look like in 25 years?