

The International Community of the Divine Savior
Presentation to the General Synod
Mrs. Judy Davis, SDS
July 24, 2008

Introduction

I stand humbly before you today, filled with enthusiasm and joy, a little sacred, yet strengthened with courage and inspiration flowing from my frequent cries and petitions of help to our Divine Savior, Fr. Jordan and Blessed Mary of the Apostles.

I would like to say "thank you" to Fr. Mario for giving us all such a wonderful presentation of the past 33 years of history which has moved us into the present moment.

In 1922, Margery Williams Bianco wrote a wonderful book for children which became a classic, *The Velveteen Rabbit*. The book is about a stuffed toy rabbit (with real thread whiskers) that comes to life from the power of love. Given as a Christmas gift to a young boy, the Velveteen Rabbit lives in the nursery with all of the other toys, waiting for the day when the Boy (as he is called) will choose to play with him. In time, the shy Rabbit makes friends with the tattered Skin Horse, the wisest resident of the nursery, who reveals the goal of all nursery toys: to be made "real" through the love of a human.

I would like to read you a short excerpt from the book:

"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful.

"When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

"I suppose you are real?" said the Rabbit. And then he wished he had not said it, for he thought the Skin Horse might be sensitive. But the Skin Horse only smiled.

"The Boy's Uncle made me Real," he said. "That was a great many years ago; but once you are Real you can't become unreal again. It lasts for always."

The Rabbit sighed. He thought it would be a long time before this magic called Real happened to him. He longed to become Real, to know what it felt like; and yet the idea of growing shabby and losing his eyes and whiskers was rather sad. He wished that he could become it without these uncomfortable things happening to him.

After what seemed like an eternity to the stuffed rabbit the boy chooses him and the rabbit gets dirty, his soft velvet fur gets worn, he loses an eye and half of his whiskers. The boy becomes very ill and the rabbit is cast aside as dirty and dangerous. The rabbit is alone; he misses the boy and begins to cry Real tears. Then the nursery magic Fairy appears and takes the rabbit to the woods and among the real rabbits she heals the velveteen rabbit. It is here that the rabbit reaches the highest level of Real.

I would like to use this little story to share with you my view of how the International Community of the Divine Savior came into being. It begins long ago, with Fr. Francis Jordan and his struggle to form the Apostolic Teaching Society, like the stuffed rabbit, Fr. Jordan's vision had to be placed upon a shelf and a more structured organization was formed, the Society of the Divine Savior, followed by the Congregation of Sisters of the Divine Savior.

After many years, the Holy Spirit challenged the Society and the Congregation, through the Second Vatican council, to research their roots and the apostolic charism of Fr. Jordan and Blessed Mary and the stuffed rabbit was again noticed and taken from the shelf. The rabbit has been called many things, a project, a movement, a lay association, Lay Salvatorians and with the process of time has grown into the International Community of the Divine Savior.

Do you see what I see? The Salvatorian Priests, Brothers and Sisters (representing the Boy), through many years of dialogue and formation, moments of joy and sadness, of laughter and anger, of tears and embraces, teaching and learning **we have become real** – we are men and women, married or single, some very simple and some highly educated; we are people who, with our life, give testimony of God's kingdom and find strength by sharing in spiritual community with other Salvatorians, the vision of Fr. Jordan, that all may know and love God and Jesus Christ whom he sent.

You have seen, through Fr. Mario's presentation, the role of the Society in helping to shape our history; you have experienced the development within your own countries,

perhaps you were even the catalyst for many who have become a member of the International Community. I would like to now take you back to the historical point at which we “officially” became organized as an international structure.

National Coordinators Meeting - 2003

In November, 2003 the Lay Salvatorian National Coordinators from seven countries received an invitation from the Society and the Congregation of the Sisters to gather in Rome. We were being gifted with an opportunity to look at three main points:

- Our current reality
 - our national realities; membership, formation, interaction among other Salvatorians and financial support
 - our countries willingness to move toward an international reality
- Our dreams
 - moving toward an international structure
 - similarities and differences among the countries
 - core values for membership and formation
 - overcoming the difficulties of communication internationally
- Participation as a part of the Salvatorian Family
 - introduction to the process used for the writing committee of the Salvatorian Family Charter
 - meeting with the two Generalates – working as a Salvatorian family at an international level

We came with hopes and dreams for the future, some had fears of what the future would unfold and some felt frustration for they had been at many of these international gatherings before and felt that we just got put back on the shelf when the meeting was over.

During this meeting the “official” structure which is now known as the Int’l Community of the Divine Savior became “real”. Fr. Mario, Sr. Edith and many other interpreters patiently helped us to understand one another and bring issues to a common place of understanding. The overall outcome of this meeting was the creation of an International Board made up of the seven National Coordinators present, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Colombia, Germany, Italy and the USA. Together, we established the *International Guidelines for Lay Salvatorian Membership* and *International Guidelines for Formation of Lay Salvatorians*. We began drafting our structure and norms of operating, electing three members as a “working committee” to coordinate communication among the seven countries, to continue the efforts begun on the structure, to create a means of financing our meetings and be a catalyst to other countries as they began forming members. We chose at that time to have the 1st International Lay Assembly in the fall of 2006 to align ourselves with the other two branches of the Salvatorian Family who would hold their General Chapters in that year. It was also determined that an invitation would be extended to any country where a national organization of Lay Salvatorians existed. We came as seven individuals representing our own reality, we departed as a joined entity centered on Fr. Jordan’s vision which had moved forward into being more “real”.

1st International Lay Salvatorian Assembly - 2006

In October, 2006 the board's membership of seven welcomed 4 new members to the table; England, Poland, Spain, and Venezuela. Members from the Society and Congregations Generalates joined us to open this historic event with a beautiful liturgy. It was inspiring to think that in three short years the Lay Salvatorian International Board had grown by almost 40%, expressing with our very existence the theme of our gathering – *Moving Ahead Courageously and Forward into the Future.*

Our time was spent tediously listening, sharing, dialoguing around three main topics and documents – communication, finances and statutes for the Lay Salvatorian International Board, Lay Salvatorian International Committee and the International Organization as a whole. Members from the Congregation and Society listened intently and offered welcomed advice and encouragement when they saw us becoming frustrated with an inability to either understand one another or reach an agreeable decision. In our infancy as an international body we of course are spending all of our time trying to organize ourselves, find our similarities, come to a consensus on the basics of who we are and how members of the Lay Salvatorians are to be formed.

We were able to make some concrete decisions in the three areas:

- Communication
 - English as the formal language
 - agreement on e-mail forms of communication
 - a time frame to respond when decisions must be made
 - lack of response after a specified time frame being considered affirmation
- Finances
 - each country committed to an annual subsidy to contribute
 - the treasury will be kept in Euro
 - each country is responsible for financing the official delegate to the international assembly each 6 years
 - the treasury would be used to fund our assemblies
- Statutes
 - a formalized name which will allow the inclusion of Deacons, Priests, Sisters
 - the members of the Lay Salvatorian International Committee (the working committee) to be chosen based on the needs of the times, the members gifts and the discernment of the Holy Spirit; gender was unimportant to us as a group
 - to increase the working committee to a five member body instead of three; an awareness that each continent should be represented if possible
 - the Lay Salvatorian Int'l Committee would meet every two years in Rome allowing a Joint International Leadership Group meeting among the three branches
 - that each country would have one vote at future International Assemblies, even though additional representatives from a country were welcomed around the table

Fr. Andrew and Sr. Therezinha were present one afternoon to listen as each country shared about the relationship the Lay Salvatorians have with the other branches of Salvatorians at a local level and a national level, and the relationships they have with their local faith communities.

Elections were held for the members of the officers of the international body and thus becoming the members of the working committee.

Those elected were:

President	Judy Davis, USA
Secretary	Sabin Ormaza, Venezuela
Treasurer	Ernes Luparia, Italy
1 st Counselor	Christian Patzl, Austria
2 nd Counselor	Idovino Baldissera, Brazil

Our final day together was spent looking forward, envisioning our work apart for the next six years. We established five commissions to move us forward into the future, choosing where each member would participate, each commission's chairperson and the basic goal of each commission.

1. Constitution and Statutes of the International Lay Salvatorians
2. Salvatorian Family Charter
3. International Lay Salvatorian History
4. Youth
5. Collaborating with Professionals and Benefactors

Moving forward in light of our challenges

All countries present thought it important to return to their home country and engage the full membership in the final decision of our name. The Assembly had narrowed the choices to four and we immediately went to work within our countries trying to discern a common name which was more difficult than we thought when we were all around the table.

Through the modern technology of e-mail and “reminders” to answer, we chose our name, The International Community of the Divine Savior. While many of the members in each of the countries still call themselves “lay associates, Lay Salvatorians, Salvatorian lay, etc we believe the name chosen gives credence to Fr. Jordan's original vision for the Apostolic Teaching Society; it allows us to write within our statutes ways which allow membership of Permanent Deacons, Diocesan Priests, Youth, Professional Collaborators and so on, leaving ourselves open to the possibilities the Holy Spirit may have for us and the Church, in the future.

This process took us 6 months and is just one example of our struggles to communicate and work effectively outside of a meeting. Although we have set up norms for communication the fact remains that any decisions needed take large amounts of time. Coupled with the fact that every member of the Int'l Board has a full time job, is married and has a family, which is their first and most important vocation to God, moving forward is a challenge.

Before I focus on our challenges however, I would like to share some of our strengths. During our formation process which includes formation in scripture, prayer, Salvatorian charism, mission, spirituality and identity the member joins with other Salvatorians in many different aspects of apostolic service. In their unique life situation, they live out their Salvatorian identity in their day to day lives as they try to bring God's kingdom alive. We are nurses, teachers, lawyers, social workers, catechists, musicians, financial advisors, counselors and so on. Ministry in all forms is valued in our lives with specific emphasis in every country on the poor and in many countries on the youth. In many countries we collaborate with others to bring basic life needs to God's people nearby and in far off countries. Community with other Salvatorians is also a very strong value in our lives, as members of the Salvatorian Family:

... we seek to provide a visible witness of men and women from diverse cultures and backgrounds working side-by-side in mission. We nurture trust and respect for the differences among us, learn from one another, and value the contribution that each is able to make for our life and mission. (Taken from the Salvatorian Charter, 14)

Thus our challenges', although we do consider ourselves autonomous we recognize we still need your help, the help of the Society and the Congregation, to fulfill Fr. Jordan's vision. We must find common formation materials, statutes and modes of operation if we are to be recognized formally. We must be able to communicate to our membership and know they are all hearing the same message.

I already expressed the challenge our leadership faces in regards to communication and giving more of their already stretched time to the service of the Board. The Int'l Board cannot even compile a membership list of names, ages, addresses, etc. Language is an issue however, even when the use of translation is done, things take months.

Further, as we try to formulate our statutes we find that each country is in a different "operating" mode making it very difficult for us to implement the same norms across international borders. In some countries the Salvatorian Family is strong and organized and in some countries the branches are present but do not interact with each other. In some places members of the International Community are considered "associated" with both branches or one or the other branch. In some places they feel held back, not allowed to move forward. Formal commitment seems to be an issue in some places and we on the board are unaware if it is an issue for the members themselves or for the religious that are leading them.

Next Steps:

How can you help us in your individual country that is question I hope you are asking yourselves right now? One of my biggest frustrations is the inability to reach the membership and know that they are receiving the "same message", when questions or decisions arise are they hearing the question, discussing the issue and giving feedback?

Some concrete ways the Society can help us move forward at this time are:

Communication –

Offer a contact from each Province; someone the Int'l Committee could communicate with, send information and receive feedback.

Assist us in creating our membership database

Assist us in delivering communications back to the membership, such as our newsletters, documents that are created

Assist in translations if needed

Education -

Assist us (the Int'l Committee) in understanding the reality of our membership in your Province

Assist us in educating all members of the Salvatorian Family

Encourage the National Coordinator of the Int'l Community to speak at national gatherings or events

Host a member of the Int'l Committee to visit and speak

We can help each country by being a liaison that can provide information, assist in formation materials and perhaps other ways.

The question we face here today, this morning, how can we lovingly collaborate together as members of the Salvatorian family to make the vision of our Founder “real”? One is to follow Fr. Jordan’s example and trust unconditionally in Divine Providence; two, follow the example of Blessed Mary of the Apostles and persevere under all circumstances; three, recognize the advice of the Skin Horse, it doesn’t happen all at once, you become, it takes a long time. However, if we are to fulfill our Founder’s vision, we must move forward, we must allow our Divine Savior to use in the process.

Judy Davis

International Community of the Divine Savior

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