

# **THE LAY XAVERIANS**

## **Characteristics of the Lay Xaverians**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Xaverian Laity came into life as an expression of a wonderful diversity of our charism. They fill our hearts with awe and gratitude. They are witness that the Xaverian charism is still alive and begets life. It's like the same seed has been planted in various lands and even different continents. The seed is nurtured by different soils, springs, winds, and care that bring to life different trees but with the same roots.

Some trees have bloomed, others are just at the beginning, others are already harvesting fruits, some have large and colorful buds, others are still different. Therefore, The Xaverian Laity presents and embodies very different characteristics in each country because of its own history, the culture of that specific reality, and many other variables that make it a multifaceted crystal.

This document collects what seems to us to be the indispensable and founding characteristics of the current Xaverian Laity. It will be a useful tool to walk together which must not deny the territorial and historical-cultural specificities of each lay community, but rather it must enhance and preserve them in a great common horizon, the fruit of lay experiences as they appear to us today.

## ABOUT THE XAVERIAN CHARISM

### 1.- From the Testament Letter

“At the same time, I draw your attention to the serious and solemn commitment we undertake in the eyes of God and the Church as a result of this approval. The importance of this event must not pass us by unnoticed; therefore, we must strive **to fulfill the sublime goals of the Institute, working with ever increasing zeal for the spreading of the Gospel among non-Christians, thus giving our own modest contribution to the fulfillment of Christ’s wish: the formation of a single Christian family embracing all humanity.** Every one of us should be intimately persuaded that the vocation to which we have been called could not be greater or more noble; it draws us close to Christ, the author and consummator of our faith, and to the Apostles who, leaving everything behind, pledged themselves entirely and without reserve to following Christ. They are the best models for our life. The Lord could not have been more benevolent towards us!” (TL 1).

All of us, religious and lay people, acknowledge our common childhood in San Guido Conforti and appreciate the beauty and majesty of our vocation. The Xaverian Laity witness the beauty and the importance of “making of the world a single family,” a task that we are called to put in practice in our daily lives.

### 2.- Scripture References:

- Mt 28:19 – “*go and make disciples of all nations,*” in the latin version “*euntes docete omnes gentes,*” that reminds us that while walking (*euntes*: walking) we are called to proclaim the Gospel.
- Act 1:8 – “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*”

### 3.- References from the Vatican II and Pope Paul the VI:

- Ad Gentes 2: “The church is missionary by nature and realizes its missionary being by assuming each and every one of the contexts in which it finds itself.”
- Paul the VI in the *Evangelii nuntiandi*: “The Church evangelizes when, by virtue of the divine power of the Message she proclaims alone, she seeks to convert the personal and collective conscience of men, the activity in which they are engaged, their life and concrete environment” (EN 18); “[The Good News] must first of all be proclaimed through witness. Here: a Christian or a group of Christians, within the community of men in which they live, manifest capacity for understanding and acceptance, communion of life and destiny with others, solidarity in the efforts of all for all that is noble and good”. (EN 21)

### 4.- Our commitment as Lay Xaverians is inspired by the life of the first Christians:

“They were dispersed from their base in Jerusalem and went everywhere spreading the Good News which had brought them joy, liberation and new life. Very often this will not have happened through formal preaching, but rather during a chat or an informal relationship between friends and acquaintances, people met by chance at home, in taverns, walking, in market squares, ... They went everywhere "chatting "The gospel [" gossiping the

gospel "]; in a natural way, with enthusiasm, and with the way of convincing that they have those who are not paid to say what they say."<sup>1</sup>

5.- The characteristics of the Xaverian Family that the Lay Xaverians live in a specific way:

- Life of faith
- Family spirit
- Humane face
- Missionary purpose

**a) Life of faith:**

(TL 3, 7, 8 and 10)

➤ From the Testament Letter:

“We will live in this way if we make faith the absolute norm for our conduct and allow it to shape our thoughts, motives, sentiments, words, and deeds. We will live this way if in all circumstances we keep Christ in mind; he will always be with us, when we pray, at the altar, when we study, in the many activities of our ministry, in our dealings with others, in times of distress, sorrow and temptation. In all things we will draw inspiration from him, in such a way that our external behavior will become the manifestation of the interior life of Christ within us.” (TL 7)

The mission is to proclaim and to give witness to Christ and His Word. Therefore, the life of faith inspires and supports the action of those who are called to the specific vocation of the mission through the first proclamation as an essential element of every baptized.<sup>2</sup>

➤ The elements of the life of faith in the Xaverian Spirituality:

\* *Caritas Christi urget nos.*

\* Following Jesus missionary of the Father.

\* Missionary charism *ad gentes* and *ad extra* [outside of one's own cultural setting even when the mission is lived in one's own country].

\* Christocentric Spirituality

\* Making of the world a single family in Christ.

\* First proclamation of the Gospel to the whole humanity.

\* Love of neighbor, works of mercy.

\* Finding time for prayer, personal and communal.

➤ Scripture References: Is 1:10-17; Mt 25; Lk 10; 15; 16; Acts 2:42-47.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoting Michael Green in Stephen B. Bevans e Roger P. Schroeder, *Teología para la misión hoy*, Pamplona: Editorial Verbo Divino 2009, p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> AG 2. “*The Church is missionary by nature, if it were not, it would no longer be the Church of Christ, but an association among many others, which would soon end up exhausting its purpose and disappear.*” (Pope Francis, World Mission Day 2017).

The "Life of Faith" which has as its origin, center and end, Christ, therefore includes love of neighbor and works of mercy as the apostle James says, "In short, as the body without the breath of life is dead, so faith. Without works she is dead." (Jas 2:26).

**b) Family Spirit:**

(TL 6, 9 and 10)

➤ From the Testament Letter

“«How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!» says the psalmist. May the lord grant that our Society always reflect such a comforting image. This will come about if the love of Christ, described by the Apostle of the Gentiles, governs our relationships and forms of all the confreres a single heart and a single mind. Let each one carefully protect the bonds of this sacred unity and avoid anything that could weaken it. Everyone must suppress his own egoism, criticism, contrariness, ostentation, and desire for the limelight. Everything should be generously offered on the altar of fraternal harmony, which makes the communal life of any institution strong and prosperous.” (TL 9).

We recognize ourselves in the intuition of Msgr. Conforti: to be a missionary family that announces that God is the Father in whom we acknowledge ourselves as brothers and sisters.

The family spirit ensures that we establish fraternal and sincere relationships among ourselves helping us to live the Gospel in everyday life. *Caritas Christi Urget Nos* to live the dimension of going out attentive to others, effectively and concretely available to meet the other and to build fraternity: a missionary family that is committed to the creation of a single Christian family, which embraces all of humanity.

This implies concrete choices that vary from one situation to another. The Lay Xaverians collaborate with each other and with the other realities of the Xaverian Charismatic Family in the realization of the one mission of Christ around the world.

➤ The characteristic elements of the Family Style are:

- \* Awareness of our common Xaverian identity: lay, religious
- \* Commitment *ad vitam*
- \* Love for our family
- \* A family life lived within a community<sup>3</sup>
- \* Love for poverty, simple lifestyle
- \* Communion of goods
- \* The only mission: witness the merciful love of God everywhere and every time
- \* Obedience
- \* Synodality
- \* Free way of serving people

➤ Scripture References: Acts 15; Gal 1:11-2:14 and 1Cor 12.

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<sup>3</sup> No, to individualism. Yes, to fraternal correction, joy, mutual help, taking care of the weak, desire to solve issues together.

From Michel de Certeau's writings:

«Here I see the "rule of faith". This is how the New Testament was called which is precisely, as a medieval author tells us, *complexio oppositorum*, "a combination of opposites": Paul resists Peter and does not say the same thing as he does; but he doesn't even have the same theology as John and James. Non-identity is the way in which communion is elaborated».<sup>4</sup>

**c) Humane Face:**

(TL 9; XV CG 27)

➤ From the Testament Letter:

“In times of discouragement, let us turn to God in prayer, stand firm in our resolve and increase our fidelity to our commitments. We are assured by the Words of the Apostle: «Let everyone stay as he was at the time of his call» [1 Cor. 7:20]” (TL 3).

“The humane face of the Xaverian. To be men of God, we take care of our deepest humanity, developing the graces and gifts that the Lord has given us, putting everything at the service of the mission, making ourselves as complete men as possible, intellectually rich, emotionally mature, and capable of authentically human relationships. The Xaverian must always show himself "joyful, casual, courteous, loyal and strong, enemy of all duplicity and pretense and always ready to undertake hardships and to face difficulties, when the glory of God and the good of souls require it.” (XV CG 27).

In his being a missionary, the Lay Xaverian embodies “the humane face” in every area of daily life: at work, in the family, volunteer activities. This allows him to live the "here and now" of the mission with simplicity and to help those who live in religious communities to perceive and grow in humanity and attention to history, a beautiful and concrete form of charity for us and for the brothers of which Msgr. Conforti speaks to us (TL 9).

➤ The characteristic elements of the humane face are:

- \* Fraternity, openness, capacity for collaboration, dialogue, planning together
- \* Hospitality, attention to the person and his story
- \* Discretion and a sense of limit in everything
- \* Sober lifestyle
- \* Mercy
- \* Ability to dialogue with other cultures / religions
- \* Be at the service of others
- \* Joy

➤ Scripture References: 1Cor 13.

“At the origin and then throughout the entire Christian life there is that radical change of which I find significant expression in a word of the apostle Peter. After the talk on the bread of life, everyone leaves: “He is crazy”, they say. Which means he is alien to our reason. “Do you want to go away too?” Jesus asks the disciples. Free to do it. "Who will we go to? - Peter replies - You have the words of life "(cf. Jn 6:67-68). Peter doesn't understand more, but he already knows that leaving

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<sup>4</sup> Michel de Certeau, *Mai senza l'altro*, Ed. Qiqajon Comunità di Bose, 1993, p. 18

him would mean leaving his own life. What that man revealed to him about his own existence. Jesus is not what he possesses, but what to live without would no longer be to live. He is already the essential, and he remains different; necessary, and uncatchable.”<sup>5</sup>

#### d) Missionary Purpose:

(LT 10)

➤ From the Testament Letter

“If we do our best to bring this about we will give our own modest contribution to the edification of the mystical body of Christ, and we will receive the same reward granted to the workers of the first hour.” (LT 10).

In this regard, the “mission” (proclamation) to the non-Christians (*Ad gentes, Ad extra, Ad vitam*) and the care to the others are for the lay person a daily vocation applicable in all different circumstances of life (work, school, leisure activities...). Meeting all kinds of people and the daily activities become areas to live the “*Caritas Christi*” that supports and motivates our commitment.

➤ The characteristic elements of the missionary purpose are:

- \* Make the world one family
- \* Evangelizing character of Mercy
- \* Commitment to live firsthand our vocation as baptized to announce the Kingdom of God
- \* Total availability to go beyond the "borders"
- \* Itinerancy
- \* Creativity
- \* Sobriety in the use of means

➤ Scripture References: Mk 16:15; Acts 4:32-35; 16:9.

“**Baptized and sent:** the Church of Christ on mission in the world. ... We can decline the mission only as a proposal of faith, which starts from God, who comes to meet us in his son Jesus Christ, and entrusts himself to the freedom of people. God does not impose himself, but proposes ... every baptized person in his own way can be a missionary, he can be an instrument of the proposal that God wants to make to humanity, through his personal witness, through his prayer and also through his offering ... The missionary dimension is inherent in baptism. Mission today does not consist only in the traditional North-South movement, with the sending of missionaries to distant lands. Even today, in the present of one's life, in our Western countries, bearing witness to the Gospel in one's state of life means being missionaries.” (Giampiero dal Toso, PMS President, 2018)

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<sup>5</sup> Michel de Certeau, *Mai senza l'altro*, Ed. Qiqajon Comunità di Bose, 1993, p. 14.



## THE TRAINING OF THE LAY XAVERIANS

### 1.- Purpose of the training

The purpose of the formative journey is to be able to implement the charism, received by Saint G. M. Conforti, in the daily life of the laity: men and women with a Xaverian denomination ensuring that they have a significant presence in society and in the Church.

The prevailing method of formation is the sharing and communication of the faith and one's own experience of God within the group, a light to our actions and our way of living.

### 2.- Characteristic elements of the training

- a) Basic Christian formation, supported by sacramental practice and personal prayer, which is not only a formal adherence to a tradition.
- b) Periodic meetings-retreats.
- c) Education in the Lectio Divina, contemplation and daily personal prayer open to the world.
- d) Sharing of missionary experiences.
- e) Reading of missionary magazines, particularly the Xaverian's.
- f) Church documents.
- g) Preparation for interreligious dialogue.
- h) Familiarity with St. Francis Xavier and St. Guido Maria Conforti, and their historical places.
- i) Knowledge of the Word of the Father, Letter Testament, Five constants, Xaverian Constitutions, Ratio Missionis Xaverianae.
- j) Annual training course, for some circumscriptions on a three-year theme.
- k) Times for sharing and life in common together with other members of the Xaverian Charismatic Family.
- l) Formal commitment to the Xaverian Laity.

### 3.- The five Xaverian pillars

The five Xaverian pillars – missionary purpose, Christocentric spirituality, consecration in baptism, family spirit, humane face - these are the foundations of the formation and life of lay Xaverians:

- a) The harmony with the Charism is the foundation of sharing in the lay group; witnessing in the environments of life and work, generates experiences of proclamation, service, and solidarity especially with the poor and the least.
- b) The laity sees life as a calling to belonging and communion with the Xaverian Family, collaborating also with the local Church.
- c) Living spaces and times of life in common with the members of the Xaverian Charismatic Family.
- d) The Lay Xaverian is open to mission experiences outside their own environment.
- e) In a spirit of dialogue, they set aside specific times for sharing and life in common in the context in which they are inserted.
- f) They embody the Xaverian's humane face.

### 4.- Possible stages and paths for a common journey of formation of the Xaverian international laity:

- a) Clarity on the vocational journey that is being developed, specifying the various stages: welcome, formation, belonging.

- b) Formation tool, obviously to be adapted in the various circumscriptions, which contains as a guiding thread the five pillars, the Testament Letter, missiology and Xaverian style as indispensable points to be deepened and lived.
- c) Shared celebration of the feasts of Saint Francis Xavier and Saint Guido Conforti.
- d) The organization of formation requires that each circumscription identifies a suitable team to guide the common path, adapting it to the socio-religious reality. If possible, with the presence of a Xaverian brother, sister, or priest.
- e) Preparing a training course for trainers and leaders.
- f) An international formation team, which prepares and proposes formation opportunities common to all Xaverian Laity and international meetings as far as possible (also online).
- g) Experiences of life in common between small international groups for mutual knowledge.
- h) Making summaries of the contents of each individual national group available on online platforms.
- i) Encourage the creation of tools that allow exchange and mutual knowledge, including participating in the online page of the General Direction.

## **LEGAL AND ECONOMIC AUTONOMY OF THE XAVERIAN LAITY**

Every reality of the Xaverian Charismatic Family, religious men and women, and the laity, is endowed with juridical, organizational, and economic autonomy, which allows them to operate within the projects that are their own.

In this perspective, the Xaverian Laity is on the way towards autonomy about organizational, juridical, and economic aspects.

At the local level, lay groups will be able to assume a juridical personality which, compatibly with the rules in force in each country, allows them complete autonomy both at an organizational and economic level.

The organization of each group can also be aimed at ensuring the ability to manage projects, structures, receiving donations or inheritances, also establishing appropriate legal safeguards especially about the management of profits and bequests.

The religious referent, at the level of local groups or national circumscriptions, spiritually accompanies the journey of the laity in a spirit of fraternal sharing of the common Charism. However, the laity are autonomous regarding their own organization, economic management and animation and mission projects, especially where they find themselves living and working in environments where there are no religious and in those areas that are proper to family, community, social and working life. On the other hand, in those areas in which several members of the Charismatic Family find themselves living together, common projects and activities can be favored, respecting the different roles and modalities of presence.

Only by starting from a clear identity that makes them autonomous in every aspect, lay people can realize that communion of charism, sharing of faith, of moments of formation and prayer with religious men and women, which allows them to arrive, where possible, at a close collaboration and co-responsibility in missionary animation activities and mission projects.

This perspective can start from a common planning of times and activities, where the groups of lay people are now ripe to collaborate in the Mission of the Xaverian Family.

From the perspective of co-responsibility for the mission, it is also possible to envisage a sharing of material and spiritual resources, to the point of imagining mixed communities of lay people and religious men and women who share every aspect of life. This communion of life is the first form of proclamation, especially in mission contexts among non-Christians.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE XAVERIAN LAITY

Within the context of the Xaverian Charismatic Family, the Xaverian Laity is structured in small and medium size local groups that usually, but not exclusively, are born and flourish around the Xaverian communities.

### 1.- The Cornerstone

A fundamental and pivotal characteristic of all the organizational aspects of the Xaverian lay groups is the Family Spirit.

Through this indispensable aspect of the Xaverian charism, the laity live relationships among themselves by helping to live the Gospel where they work and in everyday life and are urged by it to meet "the other" with whom to live the same fraternity, with the inalienable ardor to **"make of the world one family in Christ"**.

They immediately realize that dream by living relationships of profound and mutual charity. They become witnesses and heralds of it by attraction.

The Family Spirit is what the laity live primarily and which also distinguishes their way of doing things, the operational and organizational methods of the groups that are defined as real communities of Christian life which, in order to better live their journey and be able to develop, they build also organizational structures that won't cause them to close in on themselves, but rather they will make them more capable of putting themselves at the service of the mission and of the whole Church with greater responsibility and commitment. (1 Cor. 12)

### 2.- The lay groups

Each lay person lives within his/her own family but shares the life of the group in all its aspects.

The local group lives an independent life, strongly rooted in its territory.

Within each group, the leaders of the various organizational aspects are outlined. They are called to serve the group by making operational the decisions taken together. Yet, making decisions as a community remains central and fundamental. Wherever possible, a Xaverian religious is present as a spiritual referent.

The local groups hold their own elections to set up a regional coordination commission in which all the representatives of the groups of the Region converge. The commission has the task of coordinating, making operational the decisions of local groups, promoting the exchange of experiences, fostering collaboration among all, and ensuring that everyone takes part in the process.

### 3.- Areas of life of the Xaverian Laity

Possibly the local groups of each Region also share the same training, which is primarily centered on the Xaverian life, the family style, the five pillars, the mission, and a lay spirituality.

- a) A constant formation is what guarantees the growth of each lay person and of the whole group. That's what allows everyone to walk together and to verify their adherence to the charism and to the lay family both at the beginning of the journey and in their daily life (*in itinere*).

- b) In addition to formation, the Lay Xaverians share moments of prayer and family life opportunities together with the Xaverian communities of reference, collaborating spiritually and effectively in the building up of the Xaverian Charismatic Family.
- c) The life of the groups and of each lay person is centered on the five pillars, therefore, they live their work and their daily life as an instrument of evangelization.
- d) They are also personally involved in pastoral activities related to missionary, charitable, interfaith, and ecumenical dialogue areas, especially those in which (the first) proclamation and the preferential option for the poor are preferred. Such activities can also be carried out as a group.
- e) The laity live the dimension of Mission ad extra, through mission experiences that are configured as projects shared by the whole family and carried out in collaboration with the Xaverian missionaries and the Dioceses of departure and reception.
- f) The groups of the individual Regions live an experience of communion, sharing and planning through an annual assembly.
- g) The desire to share opens the way to the establishment of a world commission that gathers the representatives of the various circumscriptions.

## **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE XAVERIAN LAITY AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE XAVERIAN FAMILY**

### 1.- A relationship shaped by the Xaverian charism

The relationship among the various members of the Xaverian Charismatic Family is a richness that helps each of the components to live and grow in the charism and missionary vocation. It is the grace of the Spirit.

The missionary experience of the Xaverian Laity develops and takes concrete form in relationship with the other members of the Xaverian Charismatic Family.

Therefore, the relations between the various components of the Xaverian Charismatic Family will be marked by mutual respect, fraternity, friendship, support, collaboration, and co-responsibility according to our spirituality: "to make of the world one family in Christ".

Mutual relationship between the various components of the Xaverian Family helps everyone to grow in the spiritual life, through moments of shared prayer, retreats, and formation.

Mutual support then allows each one to best realize their missionary vocation with the characteristics that are proper to their state and context of life.

As for the laity, the presence of a religious spiritual referent in the groups helps to deepen the knowledge of the charism and to realize a journey of growth that leads to verifying and responding to the vocational calling to be missionaries.

### 2.- Ways to interact

In concrete terms, the possible ways of relating and interacting depend on the people present and working in every single local reality. Therefore, the journey of mutual knowledge and growth in sharing the charism is fundamental in order not only to carry out the various activities together, but also to think together and to be co-responsible for the incarnation of the Xaverian charism in the life of each one and in the common mission.

### 3.- Progressive development

The relationship between the laity and the other components of the Xaverian Charismatic Family (religious men and women and where present also the Laity of the Missionaries of Mary) develops progressively. We can therefore imagine some stages:

- a) Meetings to get to know each other, starting with the participation in the high points of the charismatic family. And times of sharing about what's happening in the Xaverian family (e.g. feast of St. Guido, St. Francis Xavier, Yes of the Mother, Day of the Xaverian Martyrs, etc. ).
- b) Organizing common times of prayer and formation courses.
- c) A joint participation in missionary animation activities, in the pastoral realities of the local Church, in charitable and social areas.
- d) Sharing and collaboration in dreaming, thinking, planning and carrying out activities of missionary and vocational animation, of mission *ad intra* and *ad extra*, also creating mixed teams that work jointly and permanently in the different areas of presence.
- e) Dreaming, planning and implementing paths that make possible to realize community experiences of mixed life and mission because, as the Ratio Missionis Xaverian reminds

us, "the community is in and of itself already a missionary witness and the most suitable missionary subject is not the single, but the community ".

Today the Church is called to take actions that require courage, as Pope Francis also reminds us. Therefore, it is time to dare again, believing in it together and playing our "everything" with it.

## CONCLUSION

*“The Characteristics of the Lay Xaverians”* is a text that collects the reflections, experiences, and journeys of the various groups of the Xaverian Laity in the world up to this moment.

Thanking the Spirit who generated so much life, we entrust this daring dream to all the laity and to all the members of the Xaverian Charismatic Family to continue walking together.

We invoke the protection of Mary, Star of evangelization and lay woman, of St. Francis Xavier our patron and St. Guido Maria Conforti, our founder.



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