Elisa Lisiero

Guanellian Cooperators between belonging to the Guanellian Family, ecclesial co-responsibility, dialogue and acceptance of diversity

(PART I)

1. Introduction

In the first place, I would like to thank the President of the Guanellian Cooperators for the invitation addressed to the Dicastery on behalf of the Association and for the opportunity to share with all of you who are participating in this moment of Assembly some aspects that I hope will help you on the path of lay members of an association that constitutes the third branch of the Guanellian Family.

The reflection that I propose to you arises from listening to your journey and from dialogue with those who coordinate and accompany your journey at this time; at the same time I would like to offer some coordinates to understand the ecclesial position of your reality which is part of a very broad aggregative panorama.

I have divided my intervention into two parts, each of which will be followed by a moment of debate, with questions and interventions. In Part I I will begin with some references to the lay protagonism that has crossed the history of the Church for centuries, to show how today's aggregative realities are in continuity with the waves of ecclesial movements that have crossed the history of the Church over time. I will continue, therefore, with a specific look at the charismatic matrix of many aggregative realities to bring out some characteristics of the "original charism". Finally, I will speak of the lay aggregative realities that have arisen from the charism common to one or more institutes of consecrated life (IVC), to specify the mission of the laity within them.

2. The historical framework of pre- and post-conciliar ecclesial aggregations

After the Second Vatican Council there was a flourishing of lay groups that took on above all the face of movements and new communities, characterized by some common elements, despite the peculiarity and characteristic features of each reality. Among the common aspects, to which we will return, there is the charismatic origin, that is, the fact of being born from a charism defined as "original". The movements and new communities have been accompanied by other associative phenomena that often have in common with the movements both their charismatic origin and their purely lay nature. In this regard, the document *Iuvenescit Ecclesia*, no. 2, states: "Both before and after the Second Vatican Council, numerous ecclesial aggregations arose which constitute a great resource for renewal for the Church and for the urgent 'pastoral and missionary conversion' of the whole of ecclesial life. To the value and richness of all the traditional associations, characterized by particular purposes, as well as of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, are added those more recent realities that can be described as aggregations of the faithful, ecclesial movements and new communities."

[Types of associations recognized by the DLFV] Working in the DLFV, I was able to identify some types of these realities, recognized at the international level, arriving at a classification: among them, there are associations that arose from the charism of a religious institute with a profile similar

to yours; from a confraternity; from an intuition of spirituality or apostolate; or former OIC, international Catholic organizations[1].

[Remote origin] These associative phenomena that were post-conciliar or arose before the Second Vatican Council can be inserted in a much broader historical framework, at least according to an interpretation that notes their continuity with the great currents of movements present in the Church since the apostolic age. In 1998, the then Cardinal Ratzinger, at the World Congress of Ecclesial Movements, presented a similar reading on the birth of these phenomena, tracing them back to five great waves of movements that followed one another over time, whose presence led to a revitalization of the ecclesial fabric.

These are, precisely: missionary monasticism, which developed in a flourishing way with Gregory the Great (590-604), up to Gregory II (715-731) and Gregory III (731-741), with a prominent role in the process of evangelization of Europe and which enjoyed the support of the papacy. In the tenth century the Cluny movement, with its "devotional and renewal" profile, played a role of absolute importance in the rise of the Gregorian reform, of fundamental importance for the recovery of the freedom of the Church. The evangelical movement took place in the thirteenth century, headed by the two great protagonists, St. Francis and St. Dominic, advocates of a return to the Gospel in its original purity and also proponents of an evangelizing action, entrusted to the "new class of announcers", with a wide range of action far beyond the local Church. The sixteenth century saw other movements of evangelization, including that of the Jesuits, proponents of missionary action on a global scale, together with Dominicans and Franciscans. Finally, the nineteenth century was teeming with movements from which congregations dedicated to mission, education and charity arose.

[Proximate origin] In addition to a remote origin of these associative phenomena, it is also possible to identify, according to scholars, a proximate origin, tracing them back to the Catholic associations widespread in Europe between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, *with a predominantly lay involvement and a strong dependence on the hierarchy. Among the aggregative realities, Catholic Action stands out for its remarkable development, for the capillary organization of the laity and for its eminently educational action. It is precisely from Catholic Action that various International Catholic Organizations (OIC) arise, active in various social spheres that are part of important international organizations, such as the UN. Many of these organizations will become, after the reform of the Code, international associations of the faithful, under the competence mainly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity first and then of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life.*

[Contemporary phase] *Finally, it is possible to identify a contemporary phase of these realities, limiting ourselves to considering the post-conciliar flowering of movements and new communities and further dividing this historical period. With a few exceptions, in fact, the great development took place between the seventies and nineties, while around the eighties the phenomenon experienced a certain institutionalization, as well as official inclusion within the mission of the Church, in particular thanks to the pontificate of John Paul II.*

2. The charismatic matrix of numerous lay groups

Many ecclesial groups that arose in the pre- and post-conciliar era have a fundamental theological characteristic in common, that is, their charismatic origin. This element has been

[1] Cf. E. LISIERO, *Types of International Associations of the Faithful: An Attempt at Classification*, «Ius Ecclesiae» 35 (2023), pp. 473-505.

highlighted in a particular way in studies on ecclesial movements and new communities that do not respond only to an aggregative logic of a sociological type. I cite an example, that of the Focolare Movement, that is, the Work of Mary, founded before the Second Vatican Council, by Chiara Lubich, starting from the charism of unity.

[Shared charism] *As is well known, the rediscovery of charisms took place precisely during the Second Vatican Council, with the re-evaluation of the pneumatological dimension of the Church*[2]*. This charismatic origin is emphasized by the magisterial interventions*[3] *of the pontiffs and emphasized by Iuvenescit Ecclesia. In fact, we read in n. 2 of the document: "In this sense, these ecclesial aggregations, born of a shared charism, tend to have as their goal 'the general apostolic end of the Church'". And in n. 16 we find these precious indications:*

> *Ecclesial aggregations, in their various forms, are presented as shared charismatic gifts. Ecclesial movements and new communities show how a certain original charism can bring together the faithful and help them to live fully their Christian vocation and their state of life at the service of the ecclesial mission.*

[Original charism] *We note that there is talk of a "shared charism" at the basis of movements and new communities. According to the theologian H. U. von Balthasar, this charism can be considered "original",*[4] *an expression taken up and studied by L. Gerosa who identified four main characteristics: it allows for the realization of a new way of sequela Christi; it allows the founder to exercise a fatherhood and motherhood of the faith towards other people, also arousing among the members a sense of belonging and family; it is at the origin of a strong missionary impulse of the movement; it allows the faithful to mature their identity as christifidelis and makes them perceived as a person-in-relationship.*[5]

[New sequela Christi] *When we speak of a new way of sequela Christi, we refer to the fact that the charism illuminates an aspect of the Gospel, a word of Jesus that becomes a "revelation" for the founder or founders. The call to be disciples of Jesus, in fact, is unique, but the charism determines a specific way of incarnating it. For example, the charism leads to living the unity of Jesus; or to trying to reproduce his love for the weak and the poor; or his yearning to evangelize or even his spirit of prayer. In essence, for those who adhere to the movement and who are attracted by the same original charism, a path of holiness is outlined to be implemented together, a way of following Jesus in which one aspect of his life and of the evangelical preaching is emphasized rather than another.*

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[2] See, in particular, LG 4, 7, 12 and AA 3.

[3] Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Message to the Participants in the World Congress of Ecclesial Movements*, cit., p. 18. For the relationship between the Holy Spirit and movements in the magisterium of Benedict XVI: cf. L. NAVARRO, *The New Ecclesial Movements in the Magisterium of Benedict XVI,* Ius Ecclesiae, 21 (2009), pp. 573-574. From the analysis of the Pope's various interventions on the movements, one can grasp the close link between these ecclesial realities and the third Person of the Trinity. The movements are a gift of the Spirit and, therefore, proceed from a divine initiative, not only from the simple aggregation of the faithful; they are providential instruments of the Spirit to reawaken the faith in believers; they are true and proper "irruptions of the Spirit" for contemporary society. Their charismatic origin places them at the service of the edification of the Church and at the same time gives legitimacy to their existence. On the charismatic nature of the movements in the magisterium of Pope Francis, cf. G. FELICIANI, *You can be arms, hands, feet, mind and heart of a Church that "goes forth". Pope Francis and ecclesial movements. What canonical status for new communities?* , «Stato, Chiese e pluralismo confessionale» 22 (2020), pp. 34-36, https://statoechiese.it/contributi/voi-potete-essere-braccia-mani-piedi-mente-e-cuore-di-una-chiesa-in-uscita (accessed: 12 April 2024).

[4] H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Reflections for a work on lay movements in the Church,* in *The Laity and the Mission of the Church,* edited by I. Biffi – al., Milan, Istra, 1987, p. 87.

[5] Cf. L. GEROSA, *Charism and Law in the Church. Canonical Reflections on the "Original Charism" of the New Ecclesial Movements*, Milan, Jaca Book, 1989, 79-90.

This does not mean that each person does not then translate the collective call with peculiar nuances, perhaps depending on the state of life or the different degree of belonging.

[Common vocation] *We take the liberty of proposing a further passage: if it is true that adherence to the same charism shapes a common identity, because it leads to incarnating Christian life in a particular way, then it is not too bold to speak of a "common vocation" determined by the original charism. This is affirmed, for example, by the German bishop C. Hegge, according to whom the "unique" charism of a founder becomes the vocation of all the members*[6]*. From the charism proceeds, in fact, a style of life proposed to the adherents of the movement; a spirituality; a relational style; a way of relating to material realities, up to the determinations that concern concrete areas of existence. All these aspects lead to the realization of the one call to holiness that flows from baptism in many ways, precisely according to particular vocations. As can be understood, in this case the word "vocation" is used in a sense that differs from the common ecclesial language, in which one speaks of a vocation to the priesthood, to the consecrated life and, recently, to married life, as Pope Francis emphasized in Amoris Laetitia at no. 72.*[7] *To use an expression of the theologian G. Canobbio, vocation is understood as the "plurality of concrete realizations of Christian life."*[8]

[Statutory references] If we take the *Statute* of the Guanellian Cooperators[9], we can clearly identify the references to a common charism, the same from which a male and female religious institute have sprung. We read in n. 1: "Let us adhere with joy and conviction, in our state of lay life, to the charism of St. Luigi Guanella, let us try to follow his model of life and the commitment to proclaim to the poor the good news of salvation, in imitation of Jesus the Good Shepherd and the compassionate Samaritan". And again, in n. 2: "With the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence and with the Servants of Charity, we Cooperators are also bearers of the charism of St. Luigi Guanella". Interesting, then, in no. 5, is the vocational language used: "The Guanellian cooperator accepts as a special grace and a particular gift this call of God to live a project of charity".

[One holiness with different declinations] *The charism and its manifestations, at the level of spirituality and commitments, thus shape the way in which each member lives his Christian vocation: they give it a precise face in the boundless sea of possibilities, in the tension towards the one holiness to which every baptized person is called, through different paths: "Equipped with salutary means of such abundance and greatness, all the faithful of every state and condition are called by the Lord, each in his or her own way, to a holiness whose perfection is that of the heavenly Father himself" (LG 11). Pope Francis, in the Apostolic Exhortation Gaudete et Exultate, at no. 21,*[10] *presents the saint as one who incarnates a Word of the Gospel message: "Thus, each saint is a message that the Holy Spirit draws from the riches of Jesus Christ and gives to his people. He reminds us that the paths to holiness are different." This is obviously not only true for the saints, but also for every baptized person: "Heaven grant that you may recognize what that word, that message of Jesus is, which God desires to speak to the world with your life" (GE 23).*

When we speak of adherence to a charism and what it entails in terms of declinations of Christian life, we refer to an identity dimension that comes long before the implementation of services. This also emerges in the *Guiding Document in preparation for the II Assembly of the Guanellian Cooperators, in which not only* is it affirmed that numerous contributions from the

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[6] Cf. C. HEGGE, *Il Vaticano II e i movimenti. Una recezione carismatica*, Rome, Città Nuova, 2001, p. 88.

[7] Francesco,

[8] G. CANOBBIO, *Dagli stati di vita alle vocazioni*, in *Gli stati di vita del cristiano,* edited by G. Canobbio, F. Dalla Vecchia, G.P. Montini, Brescia, Morcelliana, 1995, p. 40 («Quaderni del Seminario di Brescia», n. 5).

[9] ASSOCIAZIONE GUANELLIANI COOPERATORI, *Statute*, Rome 2015, https://www.operadonguanella.it/la-famiglia-guanelliana/guanelliani-cooperatori (accessed: 7 October 2026).

[10] FRANCIS, Exhortation. Apost. *Gaudete et Exultate*, On the Call to Holiness in the Modern World, 19 March 2018, AAS 110 (2018), pp. 1111-1161.

members highlight that membership in the association helps to "live one's baptismal vocation in a more conscious way",[11] but in which the fact that "membership in the Association does not represent only a voluntary commitment, but a call to live the Guanellian charism in daily life, in the family, at work and in the ecclesial community" [12]is placed as an element of convergence.

[Common traits of the Guanellian charism] In what is the expression of the charism for the Guanellian Cooperators substantiated? The Statutes at no. 6 state: "Guided by the Holy Spirit, Fr. Guanella lived and transmitted to the members of his family an original style of life and action that has its origin in a typical evangelical experience. This experience characterizes and gives a concrete tone to our relationship with God, to our relationships with our brothers and sisters and to our presence and action in the world."

If we go into more detail and take each of these aspects, we see that the Statutes present them one by one, providing a clear overview of how the charism determines and shapes them. As regards the relationship with God, the sense of God's fatherhood and of his Providence is highlighted (cf. n. 7); the filial dimension in Christ (cf. n. 8); a spirituality marked by the prayer of abandonment in God the Father; by love for the Eucharist; by devotion to the Virgin Mary and to St. Joseph (cf. n. 9). With regard to the relational style, the love of predilection for the poor (cf. n. 10) and the need to cultivate the family spirit (cf. n. 12) are highlighted. Finally, with regard to presence and action in the world, the common commitment of the three branches of the Guanellian Family to deepen and spread the Guanellian charism is perceived; the realization of common projects and initiatives; participation in common meetings of prayer and verification of fidelity to the charism (cf. n. 20).

So far we have highlighted the common traits, those that derive from a transversal vocation to the members of the Guanellian Family, although for each of the three branches, characterized by different states of life, there are also specific declinations. After all, it often happens that within aggregative realities arising from a charism there are people of different states of life *who share common commitments and a lifestyle clearly marked by the charism, contributing in an original way to the development of the one ideal.*

4. Associations with a charism from which an IVC arose

[Origin of associations with the charism of an IVC] Some lay groups have at their origin the same charism that has made institutes of consecrated life, male and female, flourish. If we look at the history of these associations, we see at least three situations: in some cases, a layman or a laywoman has felt particularly attracted to the charism of a religious institute and has understood that the same charismatic intuition could have been declined in the lay state, becoming a path of promotion of the Christian vocation of the laity, through the proposal of a spiritual itinerary and apostolic activities to be lived 'in the midst of the world'. In other cases it was the religious who took the initiative to found an aggregative reality of lay people attracted by the charism of their religious institute. Finally, a third possibility is that the founder of one or more religious institutes had the intuition, on the basis of a charism, to give life to a single spiritual family comprising men and women religious and lay people. In this case, the lay reality shares some important aspects with the institute of consecrated life, in particular spirituality and apostolic purposes.

[History of the Guanellian Cooperators] In the history of the Guanellian Family, this third hypothesis occurred: the founder, from the beginning of the foundation, had understood that lay

[11] *Guiding Document in Preparation for the Second Assembly of the Guanellian Cooperators,* p. 2.
[12] Ibid., p. 10.

people were also called to share the same charismatic intuition, committing themselves to a common spirituality and mission, albeit according to the differences due to the state of life. In this regard, we read on the website of the Guanellian Sisters: "With the two Religious Congregations he founded – the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence and the Servants of Charity – from the beginning the Lord also surrounded [the founder] with lay collaborators and Don Guanella considered them "all sons and brothers who with him spend either their intelligence, or their work, or their money, or their prayer, to make the works that take not only the name of Providence walk on the rails of providence, but which are worth their lives more."[13] Furthermore, the preamble to the *Statute* reads: "With contagious energy and enthusiasm, he gathered around him a group of Sisters, the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence, priests, the Servants of Charity, and lay friends, calling them to share his tireless charitable zeal in many parts of Italy, in Switzerland and also in North America."

[Spiritual/Charismatic Family] The Guanellian Cooperators are juridically a linked association of faithful that is part of the Guanellian Family, as a third lay branch. The Guanellian Family is a charismatic family, a reality composed of a "set of institutes, people of different states of life - laity, priests, men and women religious, secular who recognize themselves as belonging to the same Charism as the Founder or Foundress and are united with one another by him in fraternity in Christ".[14] In fact, as Pope Francis stated in his letter for the Year of Consecrated Life: "In fact, around every religious family, as well as in the Societies of Apostolic Life and in the Secular Institutes themselves, there is a larger family, the 'charismatic family', which includes several Institutes that recognize themselves in the same charism, and above all lay Christians who feel called, precisely in their lay condition, to participate in the same charismatic reality".[15]

Among the different realities that make up the Charismatic Family (in our case "the branches"), there is plurivocationality, since there are faithful of different states of life who have in common the same charism, the same mission, and the same spirituality. However, each reality has its own juridical text (Constitutions and statutes) and its own autonomy of governance, although lay associations, as in the case of the Guanellian Cooperators, can have the profile of an association that depends on an institute of consecrated life.

5. The role of the laity within a charismatic family

[Family, work and society: mission spaces of the laity] Up to now we have focused on the aspects of a common identity; we now enter into the specificity of the role of the laity within an aggregative reality that is part of a charismatic family.

A lay person of an association of the faithful lives his mission in the first place at the level of witness in the environment in which he is inserted: family, work and society and society. In this regard, the Council's Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity states: "There are many opportunities for the laity to exercise the apostolate of evangelization and sanctification. The very witness of the Christian life and good works done in a supernatural spirit have the power to draw people to faith and to God" (AA 6).

Participation in a movement, or, in general, in an association of the faithful, leads to living family dynamics according to a new spirit, to deepening the grace of the sacrament of marriage, received, perhaps, without great awareness. At the same time, it offers new stimuli to face the parental commitment in the light of Christian values. Many movements provide specific paths for couples,

[13] https://www.suoreguanelliane.org/diventa-cooperatore/ (accessed: 7 October 2026).
[14] UISG website
[15] FRANCIS, *Letter to Consecrated Persons on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, 21 November 2014 (III-1).

indeed, sometimes the charism is aimed mainly at the sanctification of the family and this leads to the elaboration of methodologies that favor the development of the relationship of spouses, for example with moments of dialogue and sharing in the light of the Word of God. There are numerous testimonies of Christian spouses who have positively changed the quality of their married life by becoming members of a movement and have offered a testimony of the beauty of conjugal love that goes beyond the confines of the home.

A lay person is normally inserted into a social context and a culture that brings with it values and a vision of reality. It is an area in which he is called to offer his Christian witness, especially where the evangelical ideal seems to be distant. Let us not forget that a particularly important space today is the digital world, where everyone can express himself freely and affirm convictions and choices in stark contrast with the "civilization of love".

[Guanellian Cooperators: Family, Work and Society: Spaces of Witness] In fact, the *Statute* of Guanellian Cooperators, after recalling the exercise of the *tria munera* in the lay state, mentions precisely the areas of the family, work, and society, as spaces in which to live in the first place the commitment of Cooperators (cf. *Statutes*, nn. 16-18). It is not a question of doing extraordinary things, but of being witnesses and promoters of Christian values and of those specifically linked to the charism, such as particular concern for those who suffer or who are weaker. I emphasize the value of this witness which, as Pope Francis said, can take place "in any place, in the street, in the square, at work, in a street" (EG 127).

Moreover, the priority of the testimonial dimension appears clearly in the perception of the members of the Association. In the *Guiding Document in preparation for the Second Assembly of the Guanellian Cooperators*, in the part relating to the third area, that of mission, it is stated that: "The first form of mission is considered personal witness". Furthermore, it is said that many contributions respond by speaking of daily life, specifying that "Charity spreads through example, closeness, listening and the ability to build authentic relationships [...] testimony precedes words and makes every proclamation credible [...] The spread of the Guanellian spirit passes through acceptance, listening, closeness and the ability to make each person feel loved and valued. In this perspective, service is not only an activity to be carried out, but a lifestyle that makes God's charity present in daily relationships and in the concrete situations of life."[16]

[Cooperation and co-responsibility with Guanellian institutes] In addition to the witness dimension in one's own living environment, the mission of the Guanellian cooperator is characterized by specific aspects, including collaboration with the Guanellian Congregations and their works (Statutes, nn. 20-21). Furthermore, the charism directs the mission towards the poor (cf. *Statutes* n. 23), tried in body and spirit, in a dynamism of constant going out of oneself to go in search of the poverty that is seen and that which is not seen. The *Guiding Document in preparation for the Second Assembly of the Guanellian Cooperators* speaks of "works, relationships and initiatives capable of generating hope and promotion of the person".[17]

[16] *Guiding Document in preparation for the II Assembly of the Guanellian Cooperators*, pp. 7-8.
[17] *Ibid*. p. 11.

Elisa Lisiero

Guanellian Cooperators between belonging to the Guanellian Family, ecclesial co-responsibility, dialogue and acceptance of diversity

(PART II)

1. Introduction

In this second part of my intervention, I will focus on aspects related to communion and synodality, inherent both to the relationship of the Guanellian Cooperators with the two branches of the Guanellian Family, and to the relationship of the associations with the pastors of the local Churches in which the groups and associations are inserted, touching on principles of a general nature that also apply to the Guanellian Cooperators.

2. The relationship with the Guanellian Family

[The Association of Guanellian Cooperators] In the Decree of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life of 2003, the Association of Guanellian Cooperators was recognized as the third branch of the Guanellian Family, entrusting the competent authority of the two religious institutes (the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence and the Servants of Charity) with the task of approving changes to the Statutes of the Association.

It is not my intention to enter into purely legal issues, however it seems important to recall some fundamental coordinates to understand the typology of the association of Guanellian Cooperators.

[Notes on associative law] Associations of the faithful are born on the basis of a fundamental right of the faithful, sanctioned in the Latin Code of 1983 by can. 215. The recognition of this right is an important novelty that allows the free initiative of the faithful to found associations for ecclesial ends, without the need for intervention by the hierarchy. However, the competent ecclesiastical authority can erect or recognize associations of the faithful, in different ways depending on the public or private nature of these associations. Furthermore, the competent authority maintains a duty of vigilance over all associations of the faithful, so as to avoid abuses at the level of faith and morals, and this goes hand in hand with a duty to visit such associations (cf. can. 305). The pre- and post-conciliar ecclesial aggregations, of which we spoke in the first intervention, are for the most part canonically configured as private and public associations of the faithful with diocesan or national recognition at the level of Episcopal Conferences, or pontifical (cf. can. 312).

The association of Guanellian Cooperators can be traced back to the type of associations of the faithful linked to an IVC and specifically to two religious institutes, regarding which there are some

references in the current canonical norms, in particular can. 311[1] and 677[2]. These references are important for understanding the relationship between the three branches of the Guanellian Family, specified in the Statutes of the Association.

[Duties of the Guanellian Congregations towards the Association] The two religious institutes have duties towards the Guanellian Cooperators: some of them are of a general nature, as reported by the norms of the Code, in particular to work to ensure that the lay Association is permeated by the spirit of the Guanellian religious family (cf. can. 677 §2), as well as to work to ensure that the association is included in the activities of the apostolate present in the diocese (cf. can. 311).

Other tasks are of a specific nature and we take them from the Statutes; I will mention some of them. It is up to the Superiors General to approve the amendments to the Statutes of the Association. Each group of Guanellian Cooperators has a Delegate (Servant of Charity or Daughter of St. Mary of Providence) responsible for the spiritual animation of the local Group and for the formation of individuals (cf. *Statutes*, n. 30), responsible for giving an opinion on the application for admission of an aspirant to make the promise (cf. *Statutes*, n. 33). Each Provincial Council has a Delegate (Servant of Charity or Daughter of St. Mary of Providence) with tasks of a formative and spiritual nature (cf. *Statutes*, n. 48). If there is an interprovincial council in a nation, it is attended by a delegate (Servant of Charity or Daughter of St. Mary of Providence) designated by the Superiors of the religious provinces present in the nations in dialogue with the interprovincial council (cf. *Statutes*, n. 53). The World Council comprises two members of the Guanellian religious congregations (cf. *Statutes*, n. 56) and meets with the General Councils of the two Congregations to prepare common programmes (cf. *Statutes*, n. 57).

[Interaction of the Guanellian Cooperators with the Congregations] On the other hand, the Statutes highlight the role of the Guanellian Cooperators in carrying out the common mission together with the two Guanellian Congregations, as emphasized by n. 20 of the Statutes:

> *The Association has a particular mission together with the two Guanellian Congregations. With them we collaborate in the deepening and dissemination of the Guanellian charism, we participate in the realization of common projects and initiatives, we encourage common meetings of prayer and verification of fidelity to the charism.*

There is also talk of a "concrete collaboration", in no. 21 of the Statute:

> *In the Works of the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence and the Servants of Charity and in the structures proper to the Cooperators, we find a privileged place to carry out our Guanellian vocation. Our activity will be marked by concrete collaboration and, if it is deemed appropriate, also by the assignment of activities and works by the Guanellian Congregations. In this case, collaboration is defined by special agreements.*

[1] "Members of institutes of consecrated life who preside over or assist associations in some way united to their own institute are to take care that these associations assist in the activities of the apostolate existing in the diocese, especially by working under the direction of the local ordinary, together with associations aimed at the exercise of the apostolate in the diocese."

[2] "Superiors and members are to maintain faithfully the mission and works proper to the institute; however, they are to proceed with prudence to the adaptations required by the needs of time and place, also adopting new and suitable means. §2. Institutes with which associations of the faithful are united should help them with particular solicitude so that they may be permeated with the genuine spirit of their religious family."

[Collaboration] The Guiding Document in preparation for the Second Assembly of the Guanellian Cooperators *returns to the theme of collaboration*; among the themes pointed out by the members as those that deserve particular attention is precisely the relationship between the Guanellian Cooperators and the other components of the Guanellian Family:

> *The value of collaboration with the Servants of Charity and the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence in formation is highlighted, in associative life formation courses are proposed together with men and women religious and a strengthening of common programs. There is a need for a discussion on themes of co-responsibility, participation and cooperation within the Family*[3].

> *There is also a desire to strengthen the bonds between the different vocations of the Guanellian Family, recognizing in the collaboration between lay people and religious an important resource for transmitting the charism to the new generations, accompanying local groups and making the shared mission more incisive. Despite the differences in local contexts, there is a clear desire to walk together, to support each other and to build a common future*[4].

[Co-responsibility] The Final Document of the Synod on Synodality also focused on decision-making processes, because in them the commitment of the People of God to live an effective co-responsibility is translated. However, a concept is highlighted, that of a differentiated co-responsibility, which I believe is a key to interpreting many processes at the ecclesial level and which can also be declined in the relationship within the Association of Guanellian Cooperators, in which there are members with different tasks, and in the relationship between the Association and the Guanellian Congregations.

The Document states, with regard to the articulation of decision-making processes:

> *The latter usually provides for a phase of elaboration or instruction "through a common work of discernment, consultation and cooperation" (CTI, n. 69), which informs and supports the subsequent decision-making, which is the responsibility of the competent authority. There is no competition or contrast between the two phases, but by their articulation they contribute to the fact that the decisions taken are the fruit of obedience on the part of all to what God wants for His Church. For this reason, it is necessary to promote procedures that make reciprocity between the assembly and those who preside over it effective, in a climate of openness to the Spirit and mutual trust, in the search for a consensus that is as unanimous as possible. The process must also include the phase of implementation of the decision and that of its evaluation, in which the functions of the subjects involved are once again articulated in new ways*[5].

3. The relationship with the Pastors of the local Church

Among the Study Groups set up in implementation of the Chirograph of the late Father Francis to deal with some specific issues that emerged during the Synod on Synodality, one was also

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[3] *Guiding Document in Preparation for the Second Assembly of the Guanellian Cooperators*, p. 12.
[4] Ibid.
[5] XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission. Final Document of the Second Session of the Second Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (2-27 October 2024)* 26 October 2024, nn. 90-91.

dedicated to the relationship between local aggregations and the Pastors of the local Churches. The Summary Document produced by the Group is fully available, so I take the liberty of recalling it, in its final part, because it can also offer ideas for addressing this theme in relation to the Guanellian Cooperators.

[Inclusion of associations in the particular Churches] Normally associations of the faithful operate within the particular Churches, although their diffusion can be international and their recognition sometimes reflects this structure. This leads us to consider the relationship between the association and the pastor of the local Church who is called to watch over them, as we have already recalled. Nor should we forget the role of the bishop as moderator of worship and apostolate in his diocese (LG 27).

[Principles taken from the Document of Group 6] There are specific tasks of pastors in relation to associations of the faithful present in the territory over which they have jurisdiction, but there is also an attitude of associations in entering into relationships with pastors and with local churches. Taking up the document of Group 6, Subgroup 3, it is clear the need for a "relational conversion" that can "give rise to an exchange of gifts at the service of the common mission".

> *This relational conversion (in part already underway) could be described with a twofold virtuous movement. On the one hand, pastors are called to consider the members of AFMENC not as a problem to be solved within local churches, but as faithful with whom to establish a relationship; on the other hand, the members of AFMENC are called to conceive of themselves as "on mission", abandoning all self-referentiality and putting themselves at the service of the Church. Awareness of the common mission to which one is called can foster the relational conversion desired by the Synod*[6].

In addition to relational conversion, the principle of communion emerges, to which we can refer

> *some attitudes considered necessary on the part of both bishops and moderators, such as openness and dialogue. Active, empathetic listening, free from prejudice and preconception, is also fundamental. It is thus possible to reach mutual knowledge, which in turn is favored by a proactive disposition to periodic and constant communication. A further step is also part of the spirit of communion, namely co-discernment, understood as shared participation in decision-making processes*[7].

Nor should we forget the principle of co-essentiality between hierarchical and charismatic gifts, which allows pastors to watch over the exercise of charisms and their discernment, as well as the accompaniment of the realities that arise from a charism[8].

Finally, the principle of synodality makes it possible to

> *building bonds of unity, interdependence, collaboration and co-responsibility. Interdependence consists in mutual influence, in a continuous exchange and confrontation that requires "mutual trust" between people and the coordination of one's own efforts and*

[6] STUDY GROUP NUMBER 6, *The Revision in a Synodal and Missionary Perspective of the Documents On Relations between Bishops, Consecrated Life, Ecclesial Aggregations*, p. 49.
[7] Ibid., p. 64.
[8] Ibid., p. 64-65.

> *resources with those of others in order to achieve the expected goals. To carry out a synodal journey it is not possible to act alone: others are indispensable [...]* [9].

Some concrete tools for the exercise of synodality are inclusion in the diocesan pastoral plan and in the various bodies of participation; the consultations of lay associations; the commissions of lay movements or associations; the synodal assembly and diocesan assemblies.

I believe that the principles just recalled can offer a basis for reflection in your Assembly or perhaps they can raise questions, leading to the question to what extent the Association is inserted at the level of the local Church and to what extent the relationship of local groups with Pastors is cultivated. Finally, I quote a reminder from your document that highlights the need for collaboration with the realities of the territory, both parishes and other charitable associations:

> *Numerous contributions also invite collaboration with parishes, Caritas, associations, Guanellian works and other realities in the area. This perspective is highlighted in a particular way by Italy, which proposes a stable collaboration with the realities already operating in the territory, and by Brazil, where participation in social and pastoral activities aimed at the most vulnerable people is encouraged*[10].

[9] Ibid., pp. 65-66.

[10] *Guiding Document in Preparation for the Second Assembly of the Guanellian Cooperators*, p. 8.