

Texts from the General Chapters regarding the unity of the brothers and sisters



This present document gathers what recent General Chapters said about the unity of the Congregation, so that it can be used as reflection material for the preparation of the **2018 General Chapters**.

Chapter 1 of the Constitutions, common to the brothers and sisters, was approved jointly during the **1988** General Chapters. The Holy See approved it definitively on the 9th July 1990.

From 1994 the two General Chapters began to be held at the same time and in the same house. In the joint sessions of brothers and sisters of the **1994** General Chapters, progress was made in the awareness of this characteristic of our charismatic identity and some concrete proposals were offered to the Congregation, at all levels (personal, community, provincial and general).

In the General Chapters held in **2000**, reflection took place on the structures that would best serve the union of the Congregation, and the invitation was made to encourage meetings at all levels between the two branches and to promote structures of communion.

In the text drawn up in the 2006 General Chapters once again recommendations were made that would strengthen communion between the brothers and sisters. In order to respond to the need to deepen in the understanding of our SSCC spirituality, various decisions were made: write an "SSCC Spiritual Itinerary", encourage common initiatives in ongoing formation, request to the General Governments to preserve and make the best use of our historical and spiritual patrimony, promote studies on SSCC spirituality and charism. Together with this, a section was dedicated to some recommendations on the SSCC Secular Branch.

Lastly, the 2012 General Chapters, only worked together on the theme of the SSCC Secular Branch, and arrived at the decision to create a Spiritual Animation Team made up of brothers and sisters named by both General Governments.

The collection of texts from the recent Chapters which refer to the unity of the Congregation follows.

Rome, September, **1994**
The 35th General Chapter (brothers) / The 32th General Chapter (sisters)

**TO THE SISTERS AND BROTHERS
OF THE SACRED HEARTS**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The members of the General Chapters of the Sisters and Brothers of the Congregation want to share with you what we have joyfully lived together during our Chapters, especially on the 14th, 15th and 16th of September.

Above all, we want to share with you our experience of family. For us these days were a time of grace, a privileged opportunity to strengthen our journey toward renewal. We took another step in the direction of unity, relationship and collaboration between the two branches. We encourage you to go further in this which was so dear to our Founders.

The Good Father and the Good Mother envisioned a single religious family of Brothers and Sisters having a common mission. We know that in our history as a Congregation, we have not always had glowing results in this aspect of unity that is central to our charism. We recognize, however, that many efforts have been made these last few years. A significant event that we remember, was the combined work carried out by the Sisters and Brothers in the 1988 General Chapters, which enabled us to have the same first Chapter of our Constitutions on "our vocation and mission". That positive experience also made possible a wonderful collaboration in the preparation of our two General Chapters so that we could live and work together these three days.

During these days we lived a small experience of unity that had great significance for us. Some rediscovered an element of our charism sometimes forgotten. All of us came to a greater awareness of the importance and relevance of this element and also the urgency to live more openly and committedly what the Lord wants and expects from us in this regard.

These days have helped all of us to appreciate more the fact that we are one family. As such we have received - in the community of the People of God - the gift of unity as Brothers and Sisters as a fundamental element of our identity and of our mission. This gift is expressed in a deep communion between the two branches, is rooted in the Eucharist and becomes a prophetic sign and witness.

We are urged to make this come alive as a sign in a world in which the situations in which we live are very diverse. There are places in the Congregation, in local churches, and in society where people are discovering new ways of appreciating the relationship of men and women. At the same time we see situations of oppression and injustice that are

opposed to what God wants for women. Living as a single Congregation of Sisters and Brothers can be a sign for the Church, for society and for ourselves.

We are invited to follow a path of awareness, of understanding and of mutual respect step by step. However, this path also requires clarity, decision and audacity. We grow in this when we recognize that we are one Congregation, when the mission is fundamental to our relationship and when the experiences of collaboration, though they may be small, encourage us to advance.

The climate of our meeting was one of searching in prayer and sharing. We have come to some concrete proposals:

1. On the Personal and Community Level

- a) That this dimension of unity between the Sisters and Brothers be integrated into our reflection, in a way that inspires us to a prophetic way of life.
- b) That we have an open and critical attitude to recognize that we have not always been adequately prepared to understand and live this aspect of our charism.

2. On the Provincial level

- a) That the Provincial Governments invite some members of the other branch of the Congregation to be present at their respective Provincial Chapters.
- b) That Provincial Governments deal with common themes and plan actions together.
- c) That in Initial Formation:
 - . the subject of the unity of Brothers-Sisters be treated as one of the fundamental elements of our charism;
 - . there be common periods of formation and pastoral training
 - . there be meetings of the Formators of both branches;
- d) That there be experiences of On-going Formation similar to Enclaves, Second Novitiates, and "SSCC Experience".
- e) That there be a good collaboration in Youth and Vocation Ministry.

3. On the General Level

- a) That the General Chapters treat common themes as an integral part of the Chapter itself.
- b) That the General Governments treat common themes and plan actions together.
- c) That implantations be planned together so that they would give an evident witness of our unity. Wherever one of the branches is not present, the General or Provincial Governments concerned, will plan and organize visits and meetings which will help to bring about this aspect of our charism.
- d) That the Superior General of the Brothers and the Superior General of the Sisters prepare and publish a circular letter that develops this element of our charism; the

- unity of the two branches and their collaboration in mission.
- e) That there be only one Spirituality Commission.
 - f) That we share news between us in notices and newsletters and, that in as far as possible, we would have a common informative newsletter in the Congregation.

These are the reflections and proposals we wish to communicate to you. However, we feel that they do not reflect adequately enough the life we have shared together. Life is always richer than any narration of it can convey.

May the Lord help us to be faithful to the gifts that he has given to us in the heart of the People of God.

Fraternally

The Sisters and Brothers of the Sacred Hearts, members of General Chapters celebrated in Rome during the month of September of 1994.

Rome, September, **2000**
The 36th General Chapter (brothers) / The 33th General Chapter (sisters)

The General Chapters lived the two days of work together as a moment of grace continuing to build up our Congregation in the founding spirit of our unique identity as one Congregation of Brothers and Sisters.

In an atmosphere of listening, searching together, and sharing insights, struggles, hopes and joys, the Joint Assemblies of the General Chapters reflected upon three important themes for the life and Mission of the Congregation. The following documents on **Priority Projects of the Congregation**, the **Secular Branch**, and **Structures at the Service of Communion** are a result of these reflections and discussions. Each document marks, in a sense, what has been achieved thus far and gives further orientations so that our journey in each area can continue with greater clarity and commitment.

I. PRIORITY PROJECTS OF THE CONGREGATION

(IN BROTHERS: DOC 3. N.7)

The General Chapters made the following three decisions:

1. To continue the Priority Projects of the Congregation in Africa and Asia for the next six years.
The priority nature of the Projects implies that the whole Congregation acting in a co-responsible way will support the Priority Projects with personnel and finances.¹
For the Brothers this priority refers only to Initial Formation and includes the pastoral dimension of formation which takes place with the Sisters.
And for the Sisters, this priority refers to the whole of their presence in Africa and Asia.
2. That the Brothers and Sisters of **Africa** discern together and continue to collaborate in initial formation, vocation ministry and pastoral ministry, in particular when new projects are to be started.
3. That the Brothers and Sisters of **Asia** discern together and continue to collaborate in initial formation, vocation ministry and pastoral ministry, in particular when new projects are to be started.
In particular for the **Philippines**: Brothers and Sisters will progressively and collaboratively develop initial formation, pastoral ministry and vocation ministry, according their respective possibilities.

II. THE SECULAR BRANCH

(IN BROTHERS: DOC 6)

The General Chapters recognize, as a movement of the Spirit, the growing interest of lay men and women “to commit themselves to live the Mission and the spirit of the

¹ Each branch for its part.

Congregation” (Constitutions, art. 9). This is a phenomenon which is part of something wider: the strengthening of the importance of the role of the laity in the Church based on their baptismal consecration.

As religious men and women we want to assume together with the laity of the Secular Branch, the Mission of the Congregation stated in the first chapter of our Constitutions.

With the laity of the Congregation, we want to establish a close relationship based on trust, co-responsibility, and mutual respect. The identity of our SS.CC. vocation and Mission requires this communion with one another. The Congregation considers itself as a family of religious men and women and laity with its proper charism in interdependence for the common Mission.

The present situation

- We see that is necessary to continue the process of clarification concerning the meaning of the Secular Branch, SS.CC. Laity, or other expressions.
- We see clearly that there is a diversity of situations among some lay communities and others. On the one hand, these differences enrich the meaning of the Secular Branch because the distinct sociocultural situation is taken into consideration. Nevertheless, this diversity causes concern and requires a search for solutions.
- Moreover, it is worthwhile to also point out that among the present members of the Secular Branch and those who are preparing to make their commitments, we are referring to not more than 200 persons in the whole Congregation.

The General Chapters insist that the Secular Branch has its own identity and that we should not use them for personal interest because of the lack of religious vocations, or to fulfill the needs of the Congregation’s apostolic works. Furthermore, it is not a matter of collaborating with the laity for the sake of it. We value our charism as an inspiration for lay consecration. We see this as another possibility which could exist in communion with and not excluding or replacing religious consecration.

We are convinced that it is worthwhile to promote the Secular Branch in the years to come. This animation and impetus should not be of an exclusive nature nor prevent other ways of relating with the laity in general. This relationship should be always developed and strengthened in all our communities and presences according to the orientations of our Congregation and of the Church.

1. The General Chapters *request* all the Brothers and Sisters:
 - to continue reflecting on the vocation and the consecration of the Laity to the Sacred Hearts.
 - that they consider the Congregation as an SS.CC. family, support and promote the development of the Secular Branch according to what is define in article 9 of the Constitutions and in the Statutes of the Secular Branch articles 23-32, conscious of the cultural differences which exist in the Congregation.
2. The General Chapters request both General Governments to organize a Seminar for the Brothers and Sisters who accompany the communities of the Secular Branch and for those interested in it. That it be open to the laity who coordinate the Secular Branch.

The General Chapters *recommend*:

1. That the members of the Secular Branch, as laity, live experiences of the SS.CC. Mission and, from this view point, clarify, develop and promote their specific

ways of living the common Mission in close collaboration with those who accompany them and in communion with the whole Congregation.

2. That the members of the Secular Branch, with those who accompany them, draw up in common, the content of an initial and ongoing formation program and how it should be developed and that this process be coordinated by the Brothers and Sisters responsible of the Secular Branch.
3. That a formation Seminar for the Brothers and Sisters who accompany the lay people and the laity who coordinate the Secular Branch, study the following themes: history of the Secular Branch, identity, accompaniment and animation, solidarity and interdependence among the different areas, structures, etc. within the larger frame of the Vatican II's ecclesiology which refers to the life and mission of christian laity in the Church and in today's world.
4. That the General Governments study the appropriateness and possibility of the participation of the members of the Secular Branch in the General Chapters.

III. STRUCTURES AT THE SERVICE OF COMMUNION

(IN BROTHERS: DOC. 7)

In different parts of the Congregation Brothers and Sisters work together in projects of animation, formation and mission. It is hoped that such collaborative projects will increase.

Our structures are meant to serve the life and mission of the Congregation. As these projects are concrete expressions of the unity of the Congregation, they call for co-responsible ways of making decisions.

By doing this we can make possible the unity spoken of in Article 8 while respecting the autonomy of each branch. At the same time we can respond to the needs that collaborative projects present without complicating processes of decision making.

The General Chapters **decide:**

- that at all levels of the Congregation – general, inter-provincial/conference, provincial or the equivalent – there be scheduled regular meetings between the chapters and governments of the two branches that permit planning, discerning and evaluating together common experiences of ss.cc. life and Mission. The consensus reached in such meetings would then have to be ratified by the appropriate government structures of each branch.
- that where possible such structures of communion and collaboration be promoted and expanded so as to animate the life and Mission of the respective communities.

Strengthening Communion

(Original version in Spanish)

The subject of communion between brothers and sisters is not only an option that the Chapters have taken up but it is an essential part of our charism. Jesus himself has told us that unity is an indispensable condition in order for us to be credible in announcing the Gospel (cf. Jn. 17:21, 23).

In our reflection on the subject of communion, we have seen many subjects more clearly and we are aware that we also need to reflect more deeply on some basic aspects, among them that of woman and of man in society and in the Church.

We recognized from analysis of the current situation that we have to re-learn how to treat each other not only as sisters and brothers of the same Congregation, but as men and women: correcting attitudes, prejudices and learning how to show mutual appreciation...

We also shared about experiences, concerns about the path we have followed and the structures which have helped us: fraternal, simple, valued and profound personal relations. We appreciate the efforts in the sphere of Communities in Mission and the collaboration at the level of the Common mission: common projects at the local level and in the different areas of ministry, formation, commissions, ad hoc groups and Governments.

We believe that our communion can be strengthened, improving what already exists. We also recognize that we should better manage events and poorly planned calendars, which make communion difficult as for example some distinct structures which do not allow us to deal with important subjects in common.

Communion asks from all of us great fidelity to the vocation to which we have been called through the charism of our Congregation. This communion needs reflection but also specific attitudes which demand time, methods and concrete forms. We are called as brothers and sisters at all levels, to faithfully promote unity at all levels.

Orientations

1. We ask that communion among the brothers and sisters be shown in the local communities and in all the instances of the Congregation: in reflection, prayerful discernment and common projects in mission.
2. We ask the General Governments to pay great attention to promoting communion and to be attentive to collaboration be it at the level of their own Governments, in both communities in the General Houses and at the level of the whole Congregation.

3. An important aspect which helps us to live communion is **Communications**.
 - a. We recommend that INFO SS.CC. be continued, that the Web Page be improved and that it would include the magazine Com-Union in such a way that it can be printed out in communities.
 - b. We propose that the General Governments examine the possibility of hiring a professional lay person – an expert in communications – and a brother or a sister who will assure the quality control of content.

Spirituality and Charism

Introduction (Original version in French)

In analyzing what has been achieved within the last six years we can see a variety of initiatives, yearnings and accomplishments by brothers and sisters working together in the areas of our SS.CC. charism and the broader field of spirituality. There are concrete actions along these lines and clear desires for growth and deepening both from personal and communitarian perspective as well as that of meaning and proclamation in today's world.

Today we see a great thirst for the sacred and a longing for spirituality, for meaning, and for transcendence. This is the idea that is developed in no. 41 of the working document of the International Congress on Consecrated Life (*“With a Passion for Christ and Passion for Humanity”*, Rome, 2004) when it highlights the fundamental challenge of the assertion that we as religious men and women form part of a humanity thirsting for spirituality. In no. 100 of the document it says, *“The cries for a life in the Spirit are expressed in so many ways that it is necessary that we discover them. Our brothers and sisters expect from us, consecrated men and women, a particular spiritual contribution... The Spirit is calling us to exercise the ministry ... in a new way, open to the future, entering in inter-spiritual dialogue not only to give and teach but also to listen, accept, and receive (Novo Milenio Inuente, 56 and Gaudium Spes, 92). This is our challenge.”*

From this general challenge, we see the necessity for our charism and its spiritual dimension to be an interpretive key in understanding where the Spirit is leading us in these times of change and global displacement. A fundamental challenge for us is to make the “founding” experience of our Community an actual way of life and service. Our way of being and doing mission need to be revised, “re-visioned”, in their origins, as well as, in the conditions in which we live the Gospel of Jesus Christ today. This journey of “re-visioning” gradually becomes a journey of “revitalizing” our spirituality as the unifying element of an authentic and creative fidelity to our consecration to the SS.CC.

Chapter decisions (Original version in English)

1. SS.CC. Spiritual Itinerary

The 2006 Chapters, their joint session, request that the General Governments initiate a process for developing the *Spiritual Itinerary*, keeping in mind the efforts that have already been made in this area.

The *Spiritual Itinerary* may be defined as a spiritual path or process which is an SS.CC. way of living the Gospel. It tries to unfold, deepen and harmonize the different elements of our charism. It is a path that begins when we answer God's call to 'leave everything' and continues throughout our Religious lives. This process is an action of grace through the Holy Spirit and because it utilizes our won personal experiences, it is unique for each person. As well as operating on the experiential level it is also evidenced on the symbolic level. Symbols taken from the Bible (e.g. pilgrimage, desert, etc.), the Church ('People of God', Easter, etc.), and spiritual traditions including our own founders help us to actualize our charism for today.

We suggest that an ad hoc group of sisters and brothers who are familiar with the process be asked to develop the *Spiritual Itinerary* during the next few years and that it be evaluated at the Enlarged General Council/Council of the Congregation. The process should take into account the lived experience of the sisters and brothers so as to shed light on our spiritual journey facilitate holistic integration of our spirituality and energize our options in the world and in the Church today. The *Spiritual Itinerary* would serve as an inspirational tool for our personal lives, in Vocations Ministry, Initial and Ongoing Formation, in our work with the laity and in other aspects of our vocation and mission.

2. Ongoing Formation

The 2006 Chapters, in their joint sessions, valued the different experiences of Ongoing Formation that have been realized in the Congregation and encourage the Interprovincial Conferences to continue to work towards developing joint initiatives of Ongoing Formation best suited to their own history and needs. They recognized that Ongoing Formation is wider than a spiritual itinerary; nonetheless this could become a useful resource. To prevent Ongoing Formation becoming just an intellectual exercise, it is important that the focus of any program of study should be in our lived experience and in the joint practical initiatives of projects such as "Community in Mission."

3. Spiritual and Historical Patrimony

The 2006 Chapters, in their joint sessions, requested that the General Governments jointly study how best to preserve and avail of our rich spiritual and historical patrimony realizing that our heritage is important not only for ourselves but also for the Church and those we serve. The study should deal with such things as archives, documents, monuments, spirituality centers, places of historical significance for the Congregation and costs relating to them. We believe that some of our important historical places ought to be rejuvenated by establishing a community of sisters and brothers together who would have, on an international level and in an interdependent way, a pastoral outreach in the area. We also believe that these projects could be open to collaboration with the laity and friends helping to maintain these historical places.

4. Plan of Professional Development

The 2006 Chapters, in their joint sessions, considered the importance of more sisters and brothers taking advanced studies in the spirituality and charism of our Congregation in order to be resource persons for the entire Congregation. Such studies should connect with complementary disciplines such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, interreligious dialogue, etc.

The 2006 Chapters, in their joint sessions, encouraged the Major Communities and Regions to take this need into consideration when planning Ongoing Formation and sabbatical programs.

The Secular Branch

(Original version in French)

The General Chapters congratulate the members of the Secular Branch and the sisters and brothers who accompany them along the road traveled for the work accomplished, especially at the time of the seminars. They encourage them to stay with the reflection and use all the material that is available to en flesh the SS.CC. charism of today in the world and in a way that is appropriate to them.

They support the declaration made at the Chapters in the year 2000: *“The General Chapters ask all the brothers and sisters, to continue reflecting on the vocation and the consecration of the laity to the Sacred Hearts,”* ... and, *“considering the Congregation, and as the SS.CC. family, to support and foster the development of the Secular Branch as outlined in article 9 of the Constitutions and articles 23-32 of the Statutes of the Secular Branch, acknowledging cultural differences which exist in the Congregation.”* ... And, *“that the members of the Secular Branch live experiences of the SS.CC. mission, and, from this view point, clarify, develop and promote their specific ways of living the common mission in close collaboration with those who accompany them and in communion with the whole Congregation.”*

Recommendations

*** To the General Governments**

1. That, in communion with SS.CC. laity, they continue the reflection on the place of the Secular Branch in the heart of our Congregation, and on the nature of commitment of the Laity, called to live with us our SS.CC., but in a way other than religious life, our SS.CC. charism.

*** To the Major Communities and Regions**

2. That they invite the members of the Secular Branch to significant Congregational events (assemblies, religious professions, feasts of the Congregation) and that SS.CC. brothers and sisters respond to invitations from the Secular Branch.
3. That they study the possibility of inviting some representatives of the Secular Branch to their Chapter.
4. That they delegate one or more of their members to accompany members of the Secular Branch of their sector. These mentors should serve as a privileged link between the three branches of the Congregation, and with other sectors of the Secular Branch, notably for information, formation and sharing in the life and the mission of the Congregation.
5. That they study and implement the results and the fruits of the different seminars on formation of SS.CC. laity.
6. That the brothers and sisters delegated and made available to accompany members of the Secular Branch be attentive to the quality of relations with the other branches

of the Congregation, (cf. Secular Branch Statutes 4, 17, 18-22, 33-35), notably for the formation of members and an evaluation of their engagement in the mission. These brothers and sisters are responsible for giving a regular account to their Major Community.

*** On the organization of the sectors of the Secular Branch**

7. That procedures of acceptance and celebration of the commitment of candidates be specified in the rule or the structure of each Secular Branch sector (cf. Secular Branch Statutes 27 and 28), notably to determine who is to accept the candidates and who is to accept the commitment at the celebration. The rule should also anticipate the procedure for designating the lay coordinator of the sector and the duration of his or her mandate.
 8. That in each sector of the Secular Branch a mixed committee be created composed of a brother and a sister delegated by their Major Community or Region and the lay coordinator of the sector accompanied by another lay member of the sector. This committee will be responsible for the setting in motion of the procedures for admission of candidates and the celebrations of commitment in the Secular Branch. The committee will also be responsible for keeping, for each sector, a register of those making commitment.
 9. As far as possible, each sector of the Secular Branch will take steps with the civil authorities of their countries to be recognized with their own rules and statutes, taking into account Arts. 3. g. and 28 of the Secular Branch Statutes. Each Major Community and Region should attend to this (cf. Secular Branch Statutes 24 and 27).
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INTER-CHAPTER SEMINAR ON MISSION

(Text of the chapter document of the sisters)

Aware that "communion between brothers and sisters is not an option to be taken by the General Chapters, but an essential part of our charism" (Gen. Chapter 2006), according to our Constitutions Art. 1 and 8, we began the General Chapters of 2012 of the brothers and sisters with three day joint seminar on Mission, a topic that served as a point of reference for Chapters.

Together we listened to the history of our mission and shared the experience of the Congregation today in the different continents. It was easy to relate to and share in an attitude of listening and mutual acceptance. We felt the presence of the Spirit, but also found that there was a mutual lack of knowledge, misunderstanding and even some prejudices among us.

Beginning with a reflection on the mission of the Church in a changing world, on reality and experience of life, we dreamed together about the future. Some aspects of this experience have resonated with us. They are:

- The need to get to know each other better and accept our differences.
- The need to dialogue and recognize our weak points and possibilities.
- The need to experience our complementarity as men and women.
- The need to know how to lose in order to gain, the need to allow ourselves to be touched by human suffering so as to respond with our charism of reparation.
- The need to take risks and to be available for the common mission.

This experience threw light on our work, and helped us to focus on the mission. As sisters, we were left with the following challenges:

- To encourage friendly relationships that could be a starting point to think together about new common paths,
- Where possible, to create opportunities to discern together the "new doors" that God is opening up in our world today.
- To encourage communion between brothers / sisters at all levels.
- As brothers and sisters, to search for ways to make our ss.cc. charism, spirituality and mission, more visible (Const. Art. No. 8).

THE SECULAR BRANCH

Motivation *(text only in the sisters' document)*

The General Chapters of 2006 asked the two General Governments that "*in communion with the ss.cc. laity, they continue the reflection on the place of the Secular Branch within the heart of our congregation, and the nature of the commitment of the laity called to live our ss.cc. charism, but in a way that is different from that of religious life.*" In October 2008, the two General Governments issued a Declaration on the Secular Branch, offering elements to give a response to the question about the "place" of the Secular Branch within the Congregation.

Over these years there has been a slight development in the communities of the Secular Branch in various parts of the world. There is a large diversity of styles, but everywhere there is a desire to live the secular vocation inspired by the ss.cc. spirit, and to participate in some way in the mission of the Congregation.

On several occasions, requests for help to facilitate the birth or the growth of Secular Branch communities have come to the General Governments, but they lacked a flexible structure that would enable them to give a response to the expectations for help at general level.

The General Chapters wish to offer a structure of spiritual animation for the Secular Branch at a general level, which would help to nourish communion (through a common language and exchange of information) and to throw light on the work of support at provincial and local level.

The general guidelines given by the Chapters of 2000 and 2006 are still in place.

DECISION *(text in both documents)*

(Original in Spanish)

The General Chapters of 2012 ask the General Governments of the brothers and sisters to put in place a team of spiritual animation of the Secular Branch at general level.

The function of this team will be:

- To be attentive to the development of the Secular Branch worldwide,
- Inform and sensitize the Congregation about the reality of the Secular Branch,
- Provide tools for spiritual animation and ongoing formation to members of the Secular Branch and to the religious accompanying them.

The team:

- Will consist of Brothers and Sisters appointed by both General Governments,
- Should maintain, in all its activities, a permanent interaction with members of the Secular Branch.