

Journeying with the Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament: An Introduction to its Rich History with Saint Peter Julian Eymard

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Introduction

The theme that will guide us for our reflection is: journeying with the Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament. The aim is to provide a historical-spiritual and organisational development of the Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament and to understand its past, present and future. In this regard, we can pose the question: What are the roots of our history as an organization for understanding our past, living our present, and building our future? Answering this question is not an attempt to be exhaustive, but just to give an overview for exploring the roots of our past, finding the sources for living in the present, and looking to the future.

It is important to remember a specific limitation of this review. The Aggregation for Father Eymard and in its historical evolution with the Congregation, has always been thought of as having three branches: the laity, priests, deacons, brothers and sisters, the religious. The present review only deals with the lay Aggregation but it should be remembered that there was a particular path of the Aggregation for priests (and the first member who was a bishop) which became concrete in the Association of Priests Adorers, and which had an extraordinary mission.

The ecclesiology of Vatican II, *Presbiterorum Ordinis* and the effort of the dioceses to form the spirituality of the clergy were factors in a significant reduction regarding the need for the mission of adorer priests, but the important service of the Congregation in the Eucharistic formation of priests remains today.

1. Journeying Back in Time: Historical Aspect and Documentation of Father Eymard's Understanding about the Aggregation.

1.1. A History of a Profound Root

From the very beginning of his efforts to establish his two Congregations, Father Eymard had the idea of associating lay people with his Eucharistic work. In the SSS General Archives (AGRSS), we have some ten (10) drafts of "Statutes," "Manuals," "Spiritual Rules," or "Directories," for the Aggregation, written by Father Eymard in the last years of his life.² These various manuscripts on the Aggregation reveal an immense amount of work on the part of

¹ Original in Portuguese, translated into English by the author and edited by Mona Grigsby-Suarez, Aggregation Member & Very Reverend John Thomas Lane, SSS, Provincial.

² The various drafts of the Directory, which Father Eymard did not succeed to give a final form, can be found in the section RA of the "Complete Works". We have several texts from this section in: Peter Julian Eymard, It is Christ who lives in me", Proposal of a Eucharistic spirituality, Centro Eucaristico, Ponteranica (BG) 2021, series: Bread for the journey, 4.

Father Eymard, who never stopped writing, correcting and perfecting his writings to express in the charism of a Eucharistic life lived in and by the laity.

The Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament was of great importance to Fr Eymard, both because he addressed the concept until the end of his life and because, through various projects, he gradually presented an original and prophetic vision of an association of people faithful to his charism. Understanding his prophetic vision requires dividing his work into two historical periods. Before 1858 and after 1859.³

Fr. Eymard envisaged welcoming into his Institute “three kinds of members:”: “1) The religious priests, who alone can be named to important positions in the Society. 2) The religious lay brothers, who can be entrusted with secondary work. 3) The Aggregates, in the world, namely: priests and laypersons who, desiring to share in the graces and merits of the Society, associate themselves actively in the work of perpetual adoration,”⁴ and also the vowed religious sisters.

At the beginning, in search of a universal and independent structure, between 1855 and 1859, Father Eymard dreamt that the aggregates would be members of the Society he was founding. In the draft Constitutions of the Society of the Blessed Sacrament at that time, the Aggregation was part of the Society. In the chapter entitled "The Members of the Blessed Sacrament Society," in third place, after the religious priests and brothers, he speaks of the aggregates: [...] priests or lay people who [...] form the part of Eymard family (confer RR 25).

In 1859, Father Eymard, who had just received the official approval of the Congregation by the Holy See (*Decretum Laudis*, on January 5, 1859), realised that the aggregates could not be members of his religious institute. Then, he then he began to draw up statutes for them and prepare the legal conditions for a "diocesan unionm" the first step needed to make an "universal" association.

On November 17, 1859, Bishop Eugène Mazenod canonically erected the Aggregation in Marseille, which quickly brought together hundreds and thousands of faithful (CO 896, CO 919, PS 294,3). In Paris, Angers, and Brussels, wherever Father Eymard founded communities, under these conditions, the Aggregation became a work of diocesan responsibility and any confusion over the mention of aggregates in the *Constitutions* disappeared. This other branch of the Eymardian Family, the Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament, was well established and maintained an intimate spiritual relationship with the Society.

From 1860 onwards, Father Eymard no longer mentioned Aggregation in the draft *Constitutions*. On the contrary, until the end of his life, he sought to strengthen a Eucharistic association of lay people, creating strong missionary ties between them, and linking them to the Society.

Based on a text written in 1859, Father Eymard defines the Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament:

The Aggregation of the most Blessed Sacrament, enriched by several precious indulgences by His Holiness Pius IX in December 20, 1858, has as its unique goal to procure for Our Lord in the most Blessed Sacrament true adorers in spirit and in truth, who, animated by a great spirit of faith and love, adore, love, and serve him in his

³ Manuel Barbiero, *The Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament*, 2025, p. 2, English version.

⁴ To Archbishop Sibour, May 7, 1856, RR 7,5.

adorable Sacrament, and dedicate themselves to his greater glory in fraternal union with the Society of the most Blessed Sacrament (RA 1,1).

Father Eymard offered a definition of Aggregation. He goes further, however, explaining the different ways of living this vocation as lay aggregates. Father Eymard notes:⁵

The Aggregation divides its members into three classes:

1. The 1st includes the simple Aggregates, that is, those who fulfil their duties in isolation.
2. The 2nd class is for the Aggregates who, while uniting their adorations into a regular and constant Eucharistic service, form a particular Association under the direction of the pastor of the parish, or of the Superior of a Community or of an approved Work.
3. The 3rd class includes Aggregates who, in an effort to live a more Eucharistic life, gather as a community of families, and form in the world something like a small religious cenacle" (RA 1,3).

There were individuals with a deep Eucharistic piety that they experienced in their own personal situation with the accompaniment of Fr. Eymard as their spiritual director (first class). There were groups of lay people, who had committed themselves to certain activities and practices such as adoration service, Eucharistic catechesis, sharing in the work of our religious (second class). And there were lay people coming together (RA 1,3; VIII, 413) in some form of lay community (third class).⁶

Father Eymard continued to work diligently on the configuration of the Aggregation and on December 8, 1862, a more elaborate draft of the Agrégation statute was published. He was unable to realise his dream of a universal structure for the Aggregation (see CO 1088)⁷, not least because of the difficulty of being recognised in Rome. In the meantime, he granted numerous "adhesions" to individuals and associates, as well as accompanying lay communities or cenacles as a new way of following Christ. For Father Eymard, the main objective was

⁵ ID; Guitton, *Novelle Cité*, 2012, 162-163. It gave details of the three classes of Agréés: "The first class (the Simple Aggregation) comprises the Simple and Isolated Aggregates; the only essential condition is one hour of worship per month. The second class is made up of an association of several members, who form a regular adoration service. The natural director of an association is a religious of the Holy Sacrament in the place of his residence, or a priest in the ministry, delegated for this purpose by the Superior of the Society. The third class [Eucharistic Fraternity] is formed by three or five members, who live in family community, according to the spiritual rule of the Society, and thus form in the world like a small cenacle of eucharistic and religious life, in a common and secular form" (RA 11; 1, 3; VIII, 413).

⁶ Règle de l'Agrégation, 1859.

⁷ Letter to Benque, 18 December 1861.

spiritual affiliation,⁸ having abandoned all plans for a Third Order of the Blessed Sacrament (CO 960).⁹

After the death of the Founder, the Aggregation was elevated to the dignity of a universal association with the brief of May 8, 1897.¹⁰ The Aggregation therefore continued to comprise three classes of association, but in a different way to that of Father Eymard's description. His desire for a total Eucharist involvement was transformed into a reductionist form of adoration (RA 1, 3; VIII, 413),¹¹ and completely neglected the prophetic Fraternity or Cenacles, the third group.¹² For the third group we have an explanation from Father Eymard in a text written on December 8, 1862:

Third class. Of the fraternity. A fraternity is formed of three to five members, who live in community as a family, according to the spiritual rule of the Society, and form in this way in the world a kind of small cenacle of the Eucharistic and religious life, under a common and secular form (RA 11,2).¹³

The history of the Aggregation remains inscribed in the Marseilles model, that of purely in the service of perpetual adoration. In fact, historically, the Marseilles model of Aggregation, centered on the activity of aggregates in perpetual adoration, has imposed itself on the whole Aggregation, as well as the Congregation as a whole, leaving the apostolic ministry to one side or in the background.

Recent historical research has brought to light a distortion that was introduced into Father Eymard's original thinking¹⁴. In the history of the Congregation, the "Marseille" model of the Aggregation dominated, where the center was the "Eucharistic service," the organisation of

⁸ Letter to Mme Tholin-Bost, 28 June 1860.

⁹ It should also be noted that, from his Marist experience, Eymard rejected any idea of a Third Order of the Blessed Sacrament (with the exception of a scheme for priests). "The Blessed Sacrament is not exclusive", he remarked on this subject in an instruction to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament (PS 294).

¹⁰ By a Brief dated May 8, 1897, the Agrégation, with its three branches, was established as a Primary Association, or Archiassociation, with the power to affiliate associations of the same name and nature within the universal Church (Henri Evers, *L'Agrégation du T.S. Sacrament*, Montréal, 1951, p. 34)

¹¹ Règle de l'Agrégation, 1859; Guitton, *Novelle Cité*, 2012, p. 163.

¹² Brochure dated after 1879 and entitled "To Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament."

¹³ Manuel Barbierio, *The Aggregation...*, 2025, p. 3, English version:

1. The Fraternity is aimed at lay people living in the world. Its secular character is strongly emphasised. No particular commitment was required, no private vows, even though there was a register for enrolments (cf. RA 15,4). Father Eymard speaks of a "common and secular form."

2. "Living in community as a family:" the expression is odd, referring to both religious life and married life. It should be translated: "living together, for Christ's sake, in the manner of a family." The type of life is similar to that of a family in its fraternal dimension, but the motivation is of another order: faith and evangelical charity, the Eucharist and communion as inspiration.

3. The Fraternity is situated in the context of the Congregation. It is inspired by "the spiritual rule of the Society." Though not being a Third Order, the Fraternity is spiritually attached to the Institute.

¹⁴ Guitton, *Novelle Cité*, 2012, p. 168.

adoration in its continuity and solemnity. The work of adoration, just one of the great missions of the charism, has become the main mission, and practically the exclusive one.¹⁵

In this sense, there was no longer any room for a broader understanding of the Eucharist, and even less for the prophetism of Eymardian thought on the mission of the Aggregation, of communities of Eucharistic life formed by lay people committed to the apostolic mission. To understand Fr. Eymard's thinking better, let's take a closer look at the roots of Eucharistic spirituality for the Aggregates.

1.2. The Eucharistic Spirituality of the Aggregation for Father Eymard

Father Eymard was not content to involve the faithful with just work of adoration. He wanted to propose a complete eucharistic spirituality. The dominant spiritual project was based on the utopia of the Upper Room (Cenacle) in its aspect of discipleship (time to be and pray) and apostolate (time to go and be missionaries).

The aim of the Aggregation was “to form for Our Lord Jesus Christ in his Sacrament of love, so ignored and offended, good and fervent adorers in the world; to unite all their efforts in a single Eucharistic service; and to help them to live more perfectly the life of Jesus in the most Blessed Sacrament” (RA 8,1).

In this broader perspective of Father Eymard's Eucharistic thought, the Aggregation is a spiritual affiliation to the Congregation aimed at living the whole of Eucharistic thought. The various notes that Father Eymard wrote on the Aggregation underline this point of view.

The idea was to train lay people in the Eucharistic life as the summit of their Christian life; to share in the spirit of the Congregation; to be ‘spiritual members,’ and to co-operate in its aims and works.

While the Aggregates should esteem and foster all the works of zeal, they should however consider in a more special way those that refer to the worship and devotion of the most Blessed Sacrament.

The main Eucharistic works are:

1. The teaching of Christian doctrine to ignorant children and to adults who have not made their First Communion.
2. To dedicate themselves to the work of Holy Viaticum, consisting of disposing persons who are ill for the reception of the last Sacraments: especially, to prepare a little oratory for the Holy Viaticum in the homes of the poor who are ill, and to arrange for its procession or at least accompany it as much as possible.
3. To give some active assistance in maintaining the worship, by assuring the cleanliness and decency of the sacred linens, by a proper decoration of the altar where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, by maintaining the sanctuary lamp in poor churches, and the candles for exposition (RA 7,4).

¹⁵ Manuel Barbierio, *The Aggregation...*, 2025, p. 5.

In summary, the principal Eucharistic works of the Aggregation should be: "1. to teach the catechesis of the first Eucharist to adults;¹⁶ 2. to bring communion to the sick; 3. to actively support the care of worship (RA 7, 4; VIII 425).¹⁷

Fr. Guitton (Nouvelle Cité, 2012, p. 163) points out that this perspective reflects the practice of the Faubourg-Saint-Jacques community in Paris. This perspective emphasises the relationship between the sacrament and the word of God, and between personal commitment and ecclesial life. Father Eymard linked contemplation and action, apostolate and mission. Being a true man of God, Eymard embraced the Eucharist in its totality.

An unprinted note, dated December 8, 1862 by Father Eymard, indicates the nature of Aggregation: "by Eucharistic aggregation, the aggregated member becomes affiliated to the Society of the Blessed Sacrament and, in this capacity, participates perpetually in all the graces, merits and good works of the Society, as a spiritual member" (RA 11).

Spiritual affiliation with the Society means sharing in its charism and mission; and participating, as an affiliated member, in its spiritual goods and in the building up of the Eucharistic kingdom. Another note, which precedes the Spiritual Rule of an Aggregate, says the same thing: the Aggregation of the Society of the Blessed Sacrament is a spiritual group through which a member is inspired by the Eucharistic life (RA 1,1).

Father Eymard wanted the aggregate to be not only adorers, but also Eucharistic apostles, and he wanted to sanctify them through the Eucharist to make their zeal more ardent and their ministry more fruitful.

From this fundamental idea of the spiritual belonging of the Aggregation to the Society, destined to live the whole of Eucharistic thought, it follows that the Aggregation is something essential for the Congregation, not only in the sense that it is a necessary and logical consequence of its end, but also in the sense that it is absolutely proper and personal to it.

In this sense, the entire Aggregation is called to embrace the spirituality of "small cenacle." It designates both an inspiration and an ideal model. It is a term that Father Eymard liked to use, with different meanings but with a precise content. Eymard wanted to establish a link between the Eucharistic life and the community, inviting the Aggregates to "unite their efforts", to come together as a "family community", to form a "small cenacle;" in other words, to be a community inspired by the Eucharist.¹⁸

According to Father Manuel Barbiero, SSS,¹⁹ the Eucharistic life, as seen by Father Eymard, finds its point of reference in the characteristics of the first Christian community. One heart, one soul, one love, one mind - these are the characteristics of the holy Church, he said (confer PS 360,4). "The Eucharist is a bond of unity, for family, and for true charity. We eat the same bread, in a celebration of Jesus Christ" (PG 321,2).

¹⁶ I call attention to the fact that the first work: "Teaching Christian doctrine to ignorant children and to adults who have not made their First Communion". We cannot forget that this was Father Eymard's favourite work (RA 23,5 - RA 30 - RA 31 - RA 32).

¹⁷ Feuille d'inscription à l'Agrégation du Très Saint-Sacrament, 1 Novembre 1856.

¹⁸ Manuel Barbiero, *The Aggregation...*2025, p. 3, English version.

¹⁹ ID.

The Eucharist builds community and unity: “in the Eucharist we are all with our first-born [Jesus Christ]” (PP 43,2). “In Communion Jesus Christ gives himself entirely to each one in order to make us [together], members of the one same body” (PC 12,9).²⁰

Father Joseph Vassalli called this project: “a project dominated by the utopia of the cenacle.” Even if the word “cenacle” is not found in the first and second classes, it is obvious that both classes are stimulated by this ideal of a “more Eucharistic life” which gives the Aggregation, in its internal organisation, a dynamic and progressive meaning.²¹ Father Barbeiro²² lists several correspondences inform us how Father Eymard passed on to the laity his burning love of the Eucharist and his apostolic zeal while revealing the mission he entrusted to them. To Madame Tholin-Bost Fr Eymard wrote:

So now you belong in the Cenacle with us” (CO 577). “The thought of having a branch for young people from the time of their First Communion until 15, and even 18 years of age, pleases me extraordinarily. That is your Eucharistic field [of action]: little plants to be cultivated” (CO 636). “I would like to see you go with torch in hand, like a lightning bolt, to set the fire of Eucharistic love everywhere!” (CO 744). “I am sending you a letter about the Aggregation with our little Society which you love, and which is strongly united to you” (CO 886).

To Madame Lepage, from Rennes he wrote:

Remain always an apostle of the God of the Eucharist; it is a mission of fire near those who are cold, of light for those who do not believe, and of holiness for the soul of the adorer. Jesus said: “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35) (CO 1344).²³

To Madame de Grandville he wrote:

Be the apostle of the divine Eucharist, like a flame which enlightens and warms, like the angel of his heart who will go to proclaim him to those who don’t know him and will encourage those who love him and are suffering (CO 842).

There is one thought that pursues me about you; that you should found a little family of adorers in your own house in Nantes (CO 953).

To the Countess of Fégely:

I do so wish that you would establish a house of women Adorers in your country. That is the greatest, the holiest and most apostolic thing you could do. Work for this Cenacle, you have the means, the love and, perhaps, the mission for it (CO 1333).

²⁰ In keeping with Father Eymard’s ideal, number 5 of the *Project of Life* refers to the example of the first Christian community, as presented to us in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37). The synthetic framework of the life of the first Christians shows us the effective realisation of a communion of life and attitudes around the breaking of the bread. This is the unity signified and created by the Eucharist.

²¹ Manuel Barbiero, *The Aggregation...*2025, p. 4, English version.

²² ID, p. 5.

²³ Mrs Lepage lived in Rennes. She was a widow and had no children. Letter CO 2172 refers to the presence of Miss Antonia Bost, who had chosen to remain single and who lived with her. In the letter we find these expressions: “both of them” and “Antonia, the silent one”. Both guided by Father Eymard, they formed a cenacle of Eucharistic life in the world, following one of Father Eymard’s projects.

To the Countess d'Andigné he wrote:

So, have a great love for your house of l'Isle, that Bethany of our Lord, the permanent Cenacle of his Eucharistic life! (CO 2075).

We can sum up the thoughts of Father Eymard, considering the Eucharistic spirituality of our times, as follows: a “family community” inspired by the Eucharist lives: a life of prayer, expressed in liturgical worship and a service of adoration; a life of communion, based on evangelical attitudes; and a life of mission, formed by the Eucharist.

The Aggregation experience, which culminates in life at the cenacle, is a journey of Christian formation, of personal and community maturation in the light of the Eucharist, to become a leaven of renewal in society.

Based on this perspective, which comes from the deepest roots of the Eucharistic spirituality for the Aggregates dreamt by Fr. Eymard, the Congregation returns to its source.

2. Regarding the present vision of the Aggregation

2.1. Returning to the sources based on the *Rule of Life*

It is precisely with Vatican II that we want to record an important change in the contemporary history of the Congregation and its Aggregation. The conciliar renewal of the Congregation wanted to leave the model of Marseille to return to the model of Faubourg-Saint-Jacques, or in other words, it wanted to return to the spirituality of the total Eucharist.

Alongside the work of adoration or our proper works (EEGG 34.02a), there has gradually developed a desire to renew the associative life of the laity, as members of the Eymardian Family, sharing the mission with the laity in the various parishes and Eucharistic shrines throughout the world.

In Latin America, the ERLES (*Encontro de Religiosos e Leigos Sacramentinos*), meetings of religious and lay people, was launched (1980-1990). The LITE teams (Life in the Eucharist Retreats) were also launched in the United States, (Chicago 1988-1989). There were experienced in many countries, too, and the LITE retreat represented another group. They have a high level of identification with our spirituality and mission, in which they want to play an active part of lay people associated with the SSS.

Other opportunities are present in the Emmaus Group of our European Provinces: an international group of SSS religious and young lay people, born in the context of vocational pastoral care, with experiences of mixed community life gather several times a year. There is also the Tabgha group in the Italian Province, made up of SSS religious and lay people involved in the ministry of Eucharistic evangelisation²⁴ in parishes.

This whole generation of laypeople, from the late 1980s onward, wanted to respond to the renewal introduced by the *Rule of Life* 1 [RoL]: Our ideal is to live fully the mystery of the Eucharist. And RoL 43 clearly expresses the desire for a strong Aggregation, part of the Founder's desire: "We *invite* all those whom the Spirit *directs* towards the Eucharist, priests and lay people, to join our family and share its mission."

²⁴ See the presentation of this group in: SSS International n° 114, 4 April 2000, p. 2.

Two words are particularly appropriate here: 'invite' and 'direct' (RoL 43). But it is even more important to see how they relate to each other in getting the correct understanding of who is doing what. It is the Spirit who orients²⁵ people towards the Eucharist: it takes the first initiative and leads them in a spiritual process of challenge and response.

The invitation is simply a 'taking up', a 'making our own' of that first initiative; nothing more, nothing less.²⁶ We invite the laity to take part and help them discern the Eucharistic vocation of the Aggregation, which is always God's initiative, or as RoL 43 says: “a project that the Spirit directs.”

By taking on this responsibility to invite (RoL 43), the Congregation takes a definitive step towards renewing the Aggregation with the *Project of Life*.

2.2. Charismatic Renewal with lay people according to the *Project of Life*

Following this development, Father Fiorenzo Salvi, SSS, former Superior General, wrote a letter to the entire Congregation, saying:

During these years, we have developed a rich reflection on sharing our charism with the laity, and we have sought to give life to new forms of associative life (...), we lack a "common house," an official point of reference for a proposal of Eucharistic life for the laity. And I indicated a few reasons for taking this next step: - To have as a Congregation a clear proposal at the level of inspiration and organisation for lay people who ask to share our charism and our mission as members of a public and recognised Association. - To respond to the request of the youngest part of the Congregation to have an official proposal to offer to lay people interested in sharing our charism. - To imagine for the future a Lay Movement (local, national, international) that recognises itself in a shared proposal.²⁷

The Congregation very clearly lays down the foundations of this charismatic recovery with the laity, namely: associative unity, also called "common house", which in turn does not prevent diversity, since the aggregated life must be open to different forms of association or levels of participation, following in the footsteps of the Founder (note 4). In the spirit of this unity, the Congregation dreams of an Aggregation organised at local, national (provincial) and international levels.²⁸

After the necessary consultations and study by experts, the text of the new official edition of the *Project of Life* [PoL] was announced on March 25, 2010. PoL 1 is devoted to its name:

Animated by the spirit of Saint Peter Julian Eymard, we form the Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament, an Association of the faithful proper to the Congregation of the

²⁵ The French text here has *oriente* rather than “directs” (*dirige*).

²⁶ Hans Van Schijndel, CGA, Rome 2008.

²⁷ Fiorenzo Salvi, lettre aux supérieurs provinciaux et régionaux, aux supérieurs locaux et leurs communautés, aux religieux chargés d’animer et de suivre les groupes de laïcs associés, Roma, 30 novembre 2008.

²⁸ Hans Van Schijndel, CGA, Rome 2008

Blessed Sacrament and the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament and recognised by the Church.

The fundamental principle of the unity of the associative experience of the laity in the Eymardian Family clearly indicates that the "common house" for work with the laity within the Congregation will always be the Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament" (PoL 1). The name reveals the identity and, consequently, all the provinces, regions and local communities (cenacles) have a precise identity orientation of the foundations of the new aggregated lay communities, associations or individual affiliations.

In this "common house," where the primary aim is to realise the Christian life in the light of the Eucharistic experience of the Founder, the ideal of Aggregation is revealed, a formulation very close to the one found in RoL 2. This is what we read in the PoL 2:

Our ideal is to live the mystery of the Eucharist to the full and to reveal its meaning, so that the reign of Christ may come, and the glory of God may be revealed to the world.

The Eymard family is made up of people who feel called above all to be "witnesses" to the Eucharistic mystery, taken as a whole and in all its nuances.²⁹ The word "full" refers to the objective proposed by Fr Eymard, expressed at the very beginning of the founding of his Congregation: "We want to make the whole Eucharistic thought our own" (CO 553). "We make the entire Blessed Sacrament our own" (CO 690); "We have but one thought, one goal, one centre: the Eucharist" (CO 609).³⁰

To return once again to what was said above about spirituality, the Aggregation is destined to live the whole Eucharistic mystery, destined to build the reign of God. The building of this reign is inspired by the footsteps of Father Eymard. That's why we have in PoL 3: "We draw inspiration from the teachings and example of St. Pierre-Julien Eymard, eminent apostle of the Eucharist". Father Eymard knew how to read the signs of the times and discovered that the response to his time was the rediscovery of God's love. God's love became a strong point of his proclamation and, consequently, the discovery of the centrality of the Eucharist, the sacrament of God's love.

Fr. Eymard offered everyone the path of discovery of God's love, which he called the path of true love, the shortest and noblest way, which gives everyone the "wings of a golden eagle" to reach God (confer AR 16.2; 18.2). This lifting up of the soul to the heights of God is the Eucharistic life, which is not limited to the contemplative dimension. He wanted to take the Eucharist with all its realities, to unite the active and contemplative dimensions, and to take us up to the heights, but also to throw us down, if necessary, to serve. To live this apostolic and contemplative love, the aggregate is called to live the PoL 4:

Called to live an authentically Eucharistic Christian spirituality, we are animated by the Spirit of love that led Christ to die so that we might live, and live abundantly,³¹ we dedicate ourselves to perpetuating the Eucharistic gift putting ourselves at the service

²⁹ Anthony McSweeney, *Commentario alla Regola di Vita*, p. 93.

³⁰ Manuel Barbiero, *Commento PdV*, 4.

³¹ See John 10:10

of the Kingdom in realizing the Apostle's words: *It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.*³²

This is the spirit that must animate each of the aggregate, the spirit that directs each one and gives each one the courage to say: "I live, but it is no longer I, but Christ who lives in me." A courage that transforms intentions into a lifelong commitment.

Living this spirituality requires a fundamental virtue: humility. In other words, we must realise that we can't embrace all this love on our own. We need help. We need community. Like the story in a Brazilian tale that says:

Diego had never been to the sea. His father, Santiago Kovadloff, took him to discover the sea. They travelled south. The sea was waiting on the other side of the high dunes. When the boy and his father finally reached those sandy heights, after a long walk, the sea was before their eyes. And the immensity of the sea was so great, and so luminous, that the boy was struck dumb by its beauty. And when he was finally able to speak, trembling and stammering, he asked his father: "Help me look!"

"Help me look" is the best metaphor for understanding PoL 5, which tells us about associative life or community: "The Eucharistic form of Christian living is ecclesial and communitarian." Faithful to Father Eymard's ideal, this refers to the example of the first Christian community, as presented to us in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. Acts 2, 42-47; 4, 32-37). The summary of the life of the first Christians shows us the effective realisation of a communion of life and feelings around the breaking of the bread. This is the unity signified and created by the Eucharist.

These first five numbers of the *Project of Life* are entitled "Identity and Mission" and are the gateway to understanding the specific vocation of the aggregates. However, in addition to this inspiration born of the Spirit, the PoL offers clear indications about the structure of the Aggregation, with a view to living unity in diversity.

2.3. Aggregation typology and legal configuration

The PoL 22 states:

The Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament in its essential features is structured as described here, yet capable of being adapted according to local circumstances, individuals and specific places.

Following the indications of Fr. Fiorenzo, SSS, it is necessary to have a clear proposal at the level of inspiration and organisation for lay people who ask to share our charism and our mission as members of a public and recognised association. For this reason, it is important to always reaffirm the unity around the 'same spirituality and the same ideal' (PoL 22) that gathers religious and lay people into a common Eymardian Family.

To live this unity, in addition to the level of inspiration, which has already been addressed above with the theme of spirituality, it is also essential to talk about structure or organisation. PoL 24 establishes that all associative life is placed under the Congregation's and Servants' high guidance:

³² See Galatians 2:20 and 3:28

The Aggregation, by participating in the charism of the two Institutes founded by Saint Peter Julian Eymard, is placed under their overall direction³³ It is organized on international, national, and local levels.

For the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament the National Director is the Provincial Superior or a delegated religious.

Likewise for the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, a national leader is discerned for leading the Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament, and where there is one or more of branches of the Eymardian Family, the vowed religious assist in the selection of leaders for the Aggregation.³⁴

The overall direction of the Aggregation is entrusted to the Superior Generals of the two Institutes; its headquarters is at the respective Generalates. The governance of a lay aggregate begins with clarity regarding the director's responsibilities.

PoL 27 establishes this aspect of guidance, especially based on the mission of the local Director:

The Local Director has full authority for the discipline of Aggregation members. In carrying out this responsibility the director is assisted by a Council of at least two members. These members of the Council are elected by the Aggregation members for a determined period (one, two or three years) and are re-eligible.

Although the *Project of Life* makes clear the task of the Director, it is important to emphasize: that the role of the Director of the Aggregates is primarily one of spiritual accompaniment. It is not an authoritarian position and thus does not constitute leadership in the strict sense.

This guidance must be carried out with a Council composed of Aggregates. PoL 27 establishes this aspect of leadership, and in a systemic interpretation, this council can be extended to the national (provincial) and general levels (PoL 4). As a public institution of the faithful, universal and international (Canon 312 § 1, 1), the Aggregation carries out its mission in the name of the Church and the Congregation (Po 23), that has the responsibility of presiding (Canon 311) and helping the laity in their mission.

The word used by Eymard to name the gathering of lay people attached to the Congregation is Aggregation, which in turn is found in the papal teaching or post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici* 29 of Pope Saint John Paul II:

In recent days the phenomenon of lay people aggregates [*aggregadi*] among themselves has taken on a character of particular variety and vitality.

³³ Code of Canon Law 303.

³⁴ This allows for assistance, as many Associates request, for the women and men religious to assist with leadership appointments, discernment and other needs that the Eymardian family need from one another.

Aggregation is a generic term used to call the variety of organisations of lay people united for mission.³⁵ In this sense, the Exhortation continues in the same number 29, specifying the forms of aggregations: associations, groups, communities, movements.³⁶ From the perspective of the text of *Christifideles laici*, aggregation can take the form of an association, group, community or movement, always based on the PoL, 25 states that the Provincial is responsible for new foundations (312 § 2 and 611 § 2).

In this sense, we are leaving aside the traditional three-class classification. It is true that the understanding of associative classes is now outdated. Father Eymard's intuition remains that Aggregation is a gift marked by diversity, however, all associations or individual aggregates are affiliated without distinction of class or importance. What must take priority is the associate's desire to join the Eymardian family, to be part of this great ideal. All have the same spirit and are part of the same table, with the same benefits born of the Eucharistic love of the Lord.

Following this updated perspective and along the path already idealised by the Founder (associative classes), PoL 26 points out that Aggregation can take a variety of forms, and each form will have the PoL as the basic charismatic text for organising its own status, according to its own objectives and level of commitment to the Eucharistic life, with a lifestyle and mission, always guided and configured by the PoL (see 22).

At this point, we approach a central and delicate issue for our “common home”. In this regard, it is important to consider the question of the organisational model or structure as one of the key issues. Based on a survey I conducted among the directors of the Aggregation and Provincial Superiors; some identify the Aggregation as a unique association of lay people; others believe that the Aggregation can exist without any associative relationship according to the PoL, and there are even Provinces that simply do not understand the concept of a model, organizational structure (see Graph 03 Statistical profile by model 2025).

However, with the progress of understanding made so far, there is an associative model for becoming “aggregated,” and this associative model is the *Project of Life*. Therefore, to be aggregated, the interested individual must submit to the scrutiny of an institutional leadership (PoL 24), with a specified formation process (PoL 19), followed by Admission (PoL 20), proclamation of a formula of adherence, acceptance of enrolment in the Register of Aggregates (PoL 20), leave the Aggregation (PoL 20), and finally, choose the form of association life (PoL 26).

³⁵ Nota Pastorale della Commissione Episcopale per i Laici (Italy, 1993), p. 88.

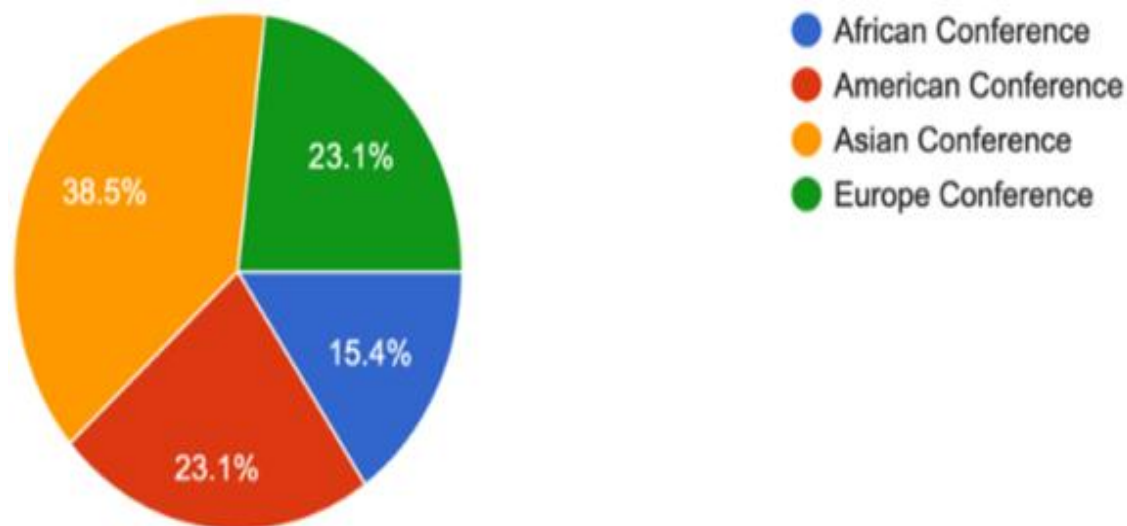
³⁶ The *Nota*, p. 88, defines each of these forms of union of the laity. Thus: a) Associations are unions with an organised and institutionalised structure, characterised by the composition of the governing bodies and the membership of the members; b) Movements: are a reality of lay union where the unifying element is not the institutional structure, but the vital adherence to the idea, the strength and the common spirit; c) Groups : are characterised by a certain spontaneity of membership, great freedom of self-configuration and a fairly small size, which leads to greater homogeneity among members; d) Communities: have a greater structure, with an approximation of the institutionalisation of traditional consecrated life.

3. Looking at the Aggregation on an International Level to Build the Future

The journey we have made so far testifies to the Aggregation's universal and international vocation. Father Eymard wished it, the Congregation realised it after his death and, today, the PoL 24 affirms that the Aggregation is organised on an international, national (provincial), and local level.

The consolidation of an international Aggregation project is still a dream. However, this dream is already beginning to take shape. In June 2025, all provincial/regional directors of the Aggregation appointed lay representatives for an international meeting of the Aggregation. The first virtual vis Zoom meeting was held in July and the second in August 2025. The path to internationality is just beginning. We need to strengthen the Aggregation members/groups at provincial and local levels. Despite the clear identity and structure that stems from the *Project of Life*, there is still a lot of misunderstanding and mismanagement in the creation of new sss SSS members of the Aggregation.

To understand the current reality better and to draw up a plan for Aggregation on an international level, it is important to consider the data from two (02) surveys carried out with the provinces and regions of the entire male branch of the Eymard Family, the Congregation in relationship to the Aggregation. These studies were undertaken between July-August 2024 and June 2025³⁷, and provides a profile of the work with Aggregation in the world, as well as offering data to design an internationality in line with the present context.



We first must consider the areas included for the 2024 survey (Graph 01). Among the thirteen (13) provinces and one (01) region, only one (01) province did not report its response. The data gathered is from, therefore, thirteen (13) responses, in other words, twelve (12) provinces and one (01) region, or 99% of the surveys sent out.

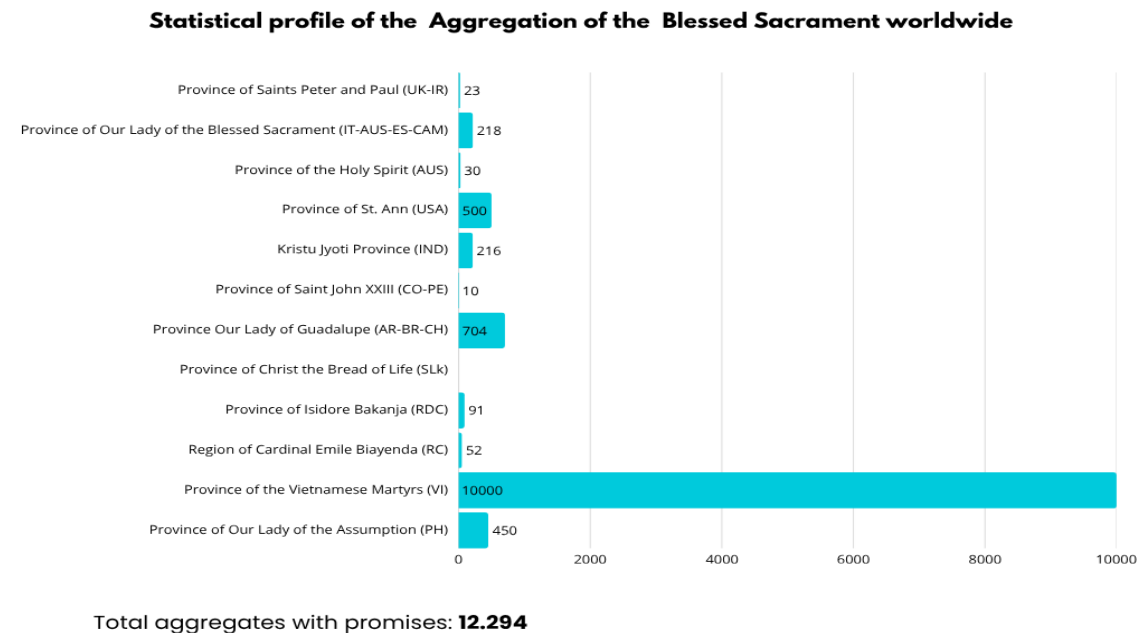
Graph 02 Universe of the 2024 survey.

In the provinces and region, the largest presence is in Asia-Oceania (38.5%), with the same organizational presence in America-Europe (23.1%). In Africa, the institutional presence was

³⁷ Data provided by a Google form survey conducted in July-August 2024 and June 2025 by Francisco Junior Marques, SSS.

lower, certainly due to the lack of response from one province and the history of the Aggregation on this continent.

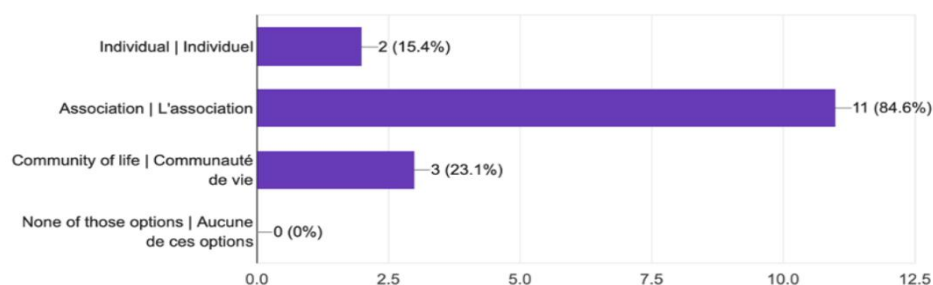
The 2025 survey presents a statistical profile with the total number of Aggregates:



Graph 01 Universe of the survey.

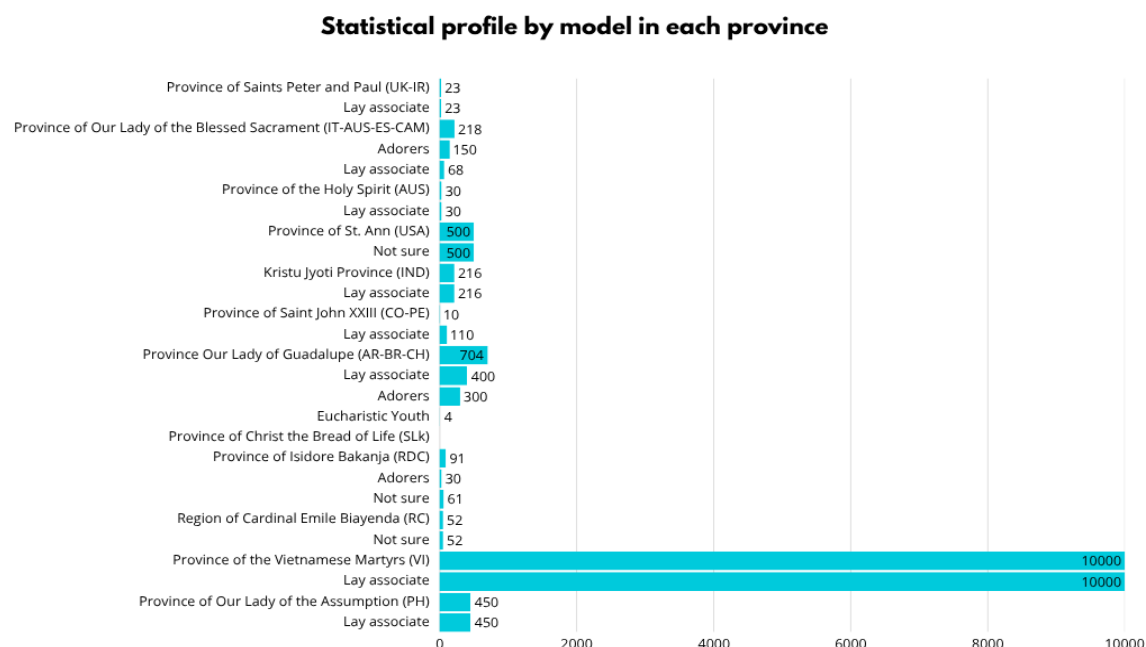
(Lack of information from the Provinces of Holy Spirit, Australia and Our Lady of Africa, Senegal).

Using the traditional Aggregation format for the survey, even though we are aware that this classification is no longer in use, as previously mentioned in this study, the 2024 survey showed that most Aggregation formats are associative



Graph 02 Traditional Aggregation format 2025

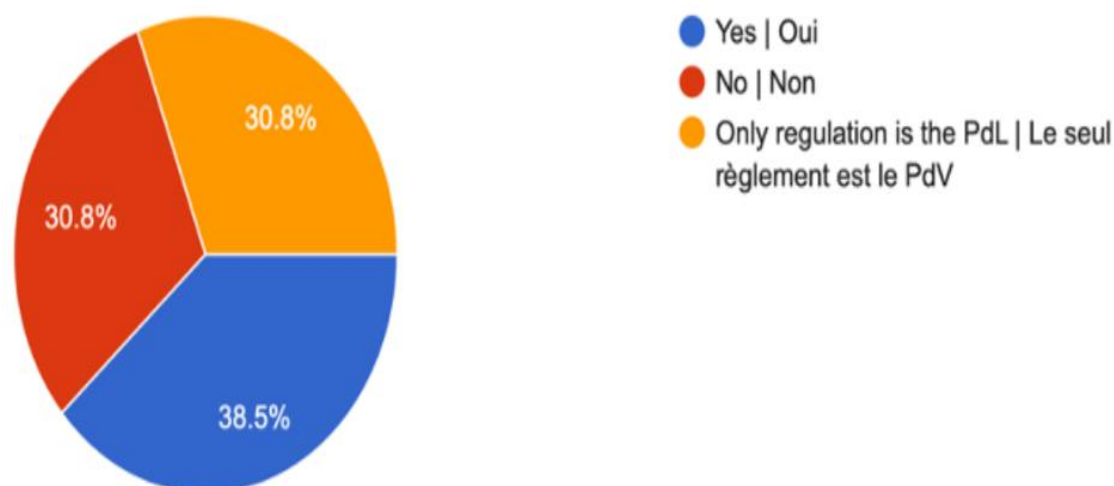
Approximately 90 per cent take the form of a lay association. An association is a union of lay people with an organisational and institutional structure, characterised by a governing body and associated members. There are also groups of individual Aggregates, namely in the case of a faithful making their commitment to a designated SSS religious (15, 4 per cent). In addition, there are indications of communities of life (23.1%). However, these data on individual vocation and community life need to be better analysed.



Graph 03 Statistical profile by model 2025

The 2025 survey confirms the data in the Graph 03, regarding traditional formats. Even though most responses recognised the fundamental identity of the Aggregation and its vocation for diversity in accordance with the *Project of Life*, there are still doubts and misunderstandings, as already presented in this study.

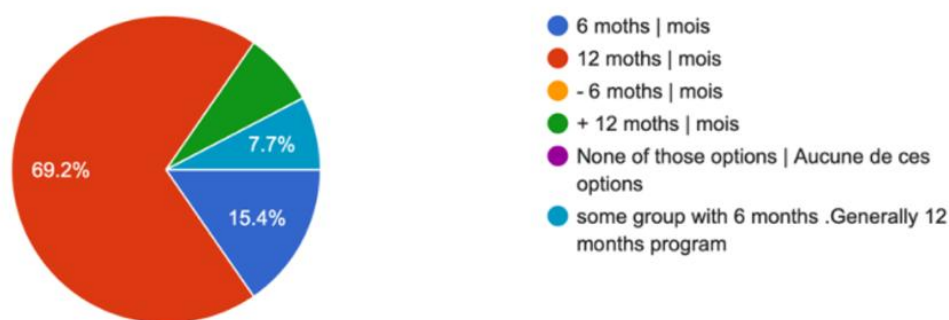
The unity and variety of the Aggregate structures have all been constituted under the charismatic, pastoral and juridical status of the *Project of Life*. With this multifaceted pastoral-legal format, the various associations within the same Aggregation generally require their own statutes based on the *Project of Life*.



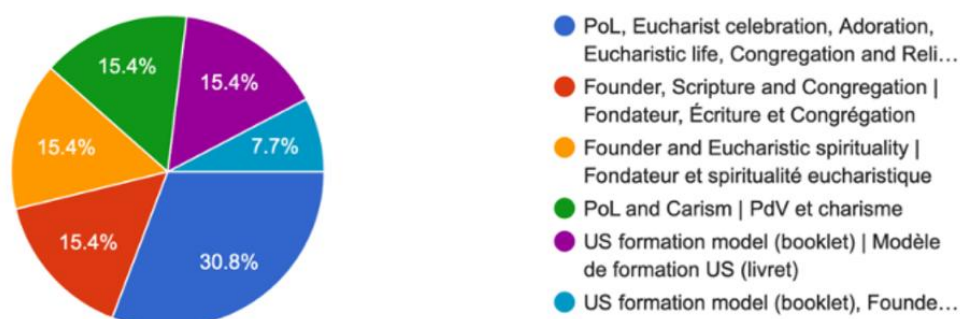
Graph 05 own statute 2024

The data below demonstrates the presence of these legal institutes for the better realisation of the mission and the construction of identity.

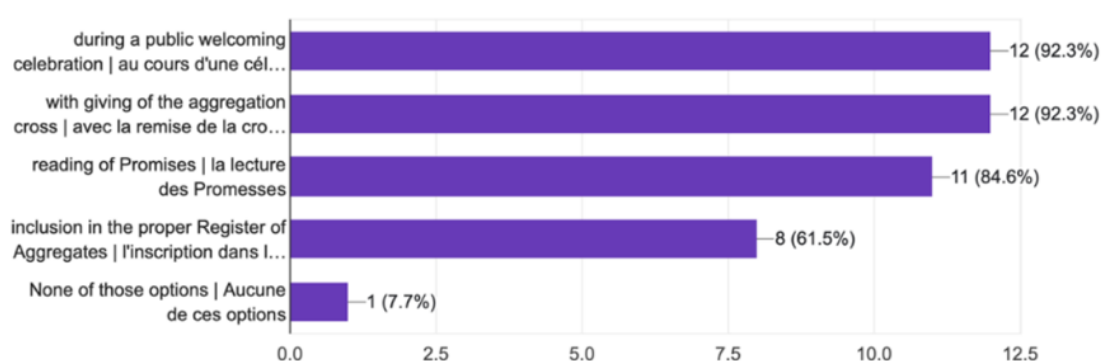
The universe of Aggregates overall follows the indications for initial formation as in the PoL, in terms of time (Graph 06) and programmed content (Graph 07). In terms of time, almost 75% have initial formation lasting one (01) year. Only 15 per cent had formation lasting six (06) months, and 7.7 per cent more than one (01) year. During this formation period, the instruction is diversified and there is no common practice, as shown in the graph below. After formation, the practice of the ritual for Formula of the Promise is very diverse (Graph 08).



Graph 06 time of formation 2024

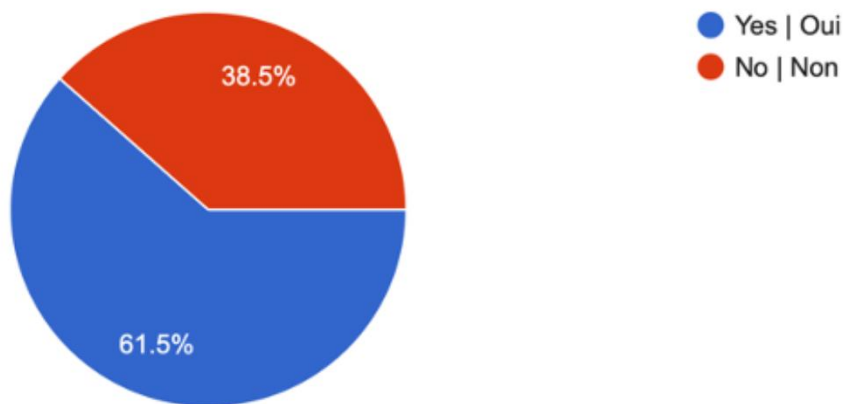


Graph 07 programmed formation 2024

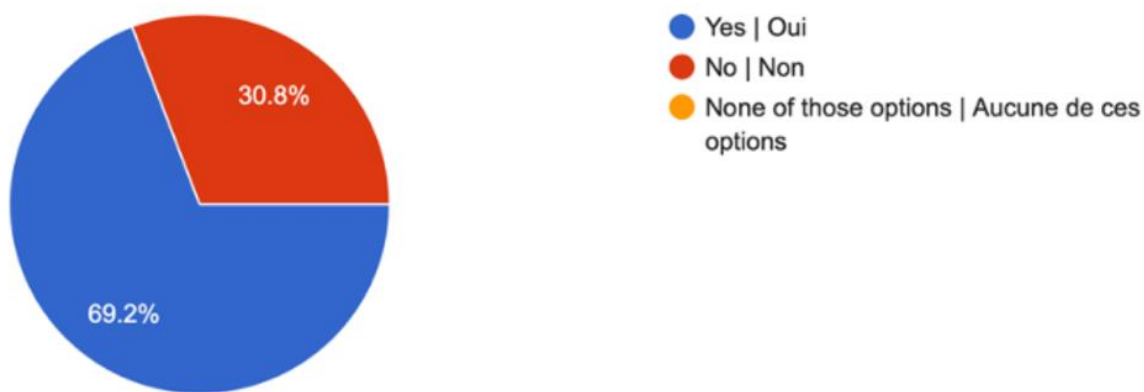


Graph 08 practice of the liturgy for the promises 2024

The final relevant data from the 2024 survey relates to directors and coordination. At provincial level, almost 75 per cent of the provinces and regions have a provincial director. On the other hand, 61.5 per cent have a provincial lay coordinator (Graph 09). At local level, 84.6 per cent of provinces and regions have a local director. In this aspect of local government, there is also an increase in the number of lay coordinators, totaling 69.2% (Graph 09).



Graph 09 provincial lay coordinator 2024



Graph 10 local lay coordinator 2024

To move one step forward and reach the international level of Aggregation, three basic principles need to be addressed. These principles are the result of bibliographical research, but their most solid foundation is based on the survey presented above. They are affiliation or association, initial formation and continuing formation.

The partnership should have a corporate character. It should be a participation with the institute as such rather than with individual religious, to counteract a selective view of our charism and to guarantee continuity beyond an individual person. It is also a way of taking lay people seriously and protecting them from abuse. From here, a broad spectrum of achievements takes shape, different in each new local context and according to the gifts and talents of the people involved.³⁸

This is one of the basic implications of true partnership. We cannot accept lay people into our wider religious family without accompanying them properly. It is also a question of respect and honesty. We still need to become more aware of our responsibility in this area. It should be a primary concern and not just dependent on occasional events. We should also be looking for a more structured way of providing support, always in line with the PoL. Project of Life.

³⁸ Hans Van Schijndel, CGA, Rome 2008.

Nevertheless, partnership is not just about the religious' role and responsibility. It also has to do with the laity, in other words, includes the involvement of lay leadership. After all, the Aggregation is a lay institute, and as the RoL says, our first mission, as religious, is to 'invite' (RL 3) and help the project 'guided' by the Spirit. The survey also presents a challenge in implementing lay coordinators who lead the Aggregation in communion with the directors (Graphs 09 and 10).

A further important principle is that of initial formation and the celebration of promises. The survey indicates a diversity of practices on initial formation (Graph 07) that can hinder the 'common home' so well worked on by Father Fiorenzo. There should be guidelines for initial formation in the light of the long tradition of the Congregation, founded on Eucharistic spirituality in its trilogy of life of companionship, prayer and service, itself founded on the Lord's Passover, that is, life, death and resurrection. In addition, the guidelines for initial formation should include the history of the Eymardian family and the history and spirituality of the Founder.

The PoL, 19 gives some general indications on the content of initial formation, but the question of a guideline for initial formation for the Aggregation is still unfinished and requires a major effort on the part of the Congregation to be achieved.

Following the same diffuse dynamics of formation, the celebration of promises appears with different rites that can cause some confusion for the entire Aggregation. In this sense, it would be good to think of a liturgical form or indications for this moment of celebration, which is so important for all the members (Graph 08).

Similarly, a dynamic, up-to-date and multicultural ongoing formation programme is essential. The PoL 21, gives general indications, but it would be important for the Congregation (and perhaps the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament) to help it to have clear priorities, linking them to continental and provincial needs. This is also an essential element of the list of projects to be carried out in the future.

By applying these principles and relying on the synergy of all the SSS religious, the lay aggregate will be able to truly dispose of this 'common house', even on an international level.

We will then be able to dream bigger, and to reflect on how to set up a network of communication between and with lay aggregate, in order to offer some form of mutual accompaniment and encouragement, whether at local, national or even global level.

Conclusion

Our Eymardian family's journey through history has taken us to the roots of this profound Eucharistic vocation of the SSS laity and clerics associated with the SSS. From the beginning, the Founder wanted the Aggregation to be an important branch of this Eucharistic family. In fact, the Aggregation is a branch of the great tree of the Eucharistic vocation.

Every Aggregate is attached to the family by spiritual affiliation, which means the charismatic sharing of the total Eucharistic Christ. This is the charismatic model of the entire Eymardian Family, desired and realised by Father Eymard and reaffirmed by the Congregation today.

Aggregation is a large umbrella (see writings of Father Fiorenzo Salvi, SSS), and under this umbrella are all those who wish to be part of this Eucharistic spiritual affiliation, at all levels of commitment, whether in the form of an individual, an association, a community of life, or whatever aggregate form the Spirit inspires, always assisted by the Congregation and rooted in the *Project of Life*.

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