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Divine Word society tackles internal friction

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Fr. Nicholas Martis

INDORE, India (UCAN) ? A Divine Word province in India has launched a live-in seminar to tackle disunity among its members and prepare them to address modern challenges.

?Togetherness and family spirit among our members have weakened and I felt a need for reviving and strengthening them,? said Fr. Nicholas Martis, who heads the congregation?s Central India province.

The 11-day seminar began Feb. 15 at the provincial headquarters in Indore, the commercial capital of Madhya Pradesh state. The province?s 146 members are undergoing the program in three batches.

Martis said the program aims to strengthen the ?one family? spirit among members so that they can carry on their mission work effectively.

He said over the years, different assignments and responsibilities have generated individualistic attitudes among members rather than team spirit.

The congregation has some 800 members in four provinces of India, but only the Central Province has undertaken the exercise.

?Gossip, regionalism and ethnic groupism have crept in our life knowingly or unknowingly,? admitted Martis, who took over the province in May 2009. He said these trends have ?adversely? affected the congregation?s mission work.

?We have to live together as one family in Christ. Then only could we continue his mission successfully,? he asserted. He said his confreres are not willing to talk to each other as family members. ?We say so many things behind [others' backs.] This is bad for our mission,? he added.

?Good to be reminded of our weaknesses?

He said the seminar is addressing these problems and everyone, ?including me,? would benefit from it. He said response to the program has been ?very good.?

Fr. Emmanuel Bilung, one of the participants, has welcomed the province?s ?bold step? in accepting its weaknesses and its willingness to correct them. ?Such a move will strengthen our mission and help us live as one family,? the tribal priest told UCA News.

Another participant, Fr. Mathew Chemprampally, found it useful to be reminded of ?our weaknesses.? The priest from Kerala, southern India, said he is happy that the seminar is ?really strengthening our one family spirit and our work.?

However, one priest, who preferred to remain anonymous, said the seminar would bring only external changes. ?The seminar is good, but will not have lasting effect on members. Internally, we will live divided and in groups,? he told UCA News.

Asked why he is so pessimistic, he said, ?Old habits die hard.?

The congregation began its work in India at Indore in 1932, with 13 members. It now has 200 centers in 45 dioceses. Some 170 Indian members are currently on overseas assignments.

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