The Situation in Ireland and Britain

There are 40 confrères working in the Province

39 priests and 1 deacon (to be ordained a priest next year)

4 confrères from other Provinces:

2 from Nigeria

1 from Ethiopia

1 from Philippines

No students now

Three enquiries which look sort of promising

Other young men are associated with us who, in the past, would have been seen as almost certain to join us.

The Province has established a Vocations Committee, one confrère in Ireland and one in Britain and myself rather than give the responsibility to a single confrère who in the past often worked alone and found it hard to engage other confrères.

In the past older confrères have said that they joined because they wanted to be priests.

Today, in the minds of young men, priesthood is something their grandparents generation or before them might have pursued.

They do not have an uncle in the family or among their parents' friends who is a priest.

And, celibacy holds no attraction for them. Even if they are not sexually active at present they do not intend to stay so for long.

On top of all of that, faith and the religious practices which may express that faith are alien.

As close as we might come to appreciating what faith is for young people today is for any of us to visit a mosque or a synagogue and be aware of how we feel in that building.

Istanbul and Budapest

It seems familiar but it did not speak to me because I could not read the building. The decor, the inscriptions seemed alien to me.

Our churches, our language, our way of looking at the world around us say almost nothing to young people who, even if they are well disposed, are puzzled or only barely understand.

The culture no longer holds our different senses of things together.

Illustration of this - introduction of same sex marriage and abortion by large majorities in national referendums in recent years...and on each occasion using the language of compassion and respect.

The language of the Gospel is being used against us because Christians and Catholics in particular are seen to have surrendered any right to such terms because of sexual abuse of children by priests and religious.

If we are to restore the mission of the Congregation, it must be because we revisit and renew our deepest sense that it is Christ who has called us together for the purpose of bringing good news to people everywhere who desperately need to hear it. And to bring good news, we must be good news ourselves. It must look to those who see us coming that we are men who enjoy having received our calling and who enjoy living by our calling.

But it begins and ends with Christ - in personal relationship with Christ and in communion with others, that is, our confrères and the Church.

As strange and as difficult as it might be to live with each other and in the Church, we must show that to be part of how Christ makes us one far outweighs the burden of having to tolerate each other.

We must be able to show too that to live as we do, in community, in solidarity and in obligation to each other is also a wholesome way of life.

Another thought is to suggest that for the moment and perhaps for many years to come we may not need big numbers of confrères.

Large numbers of priests and religious can inhibit the development of lay ministry. The church does not have to clerical all the way through.

A fresh approach, a new church - if the generational shift is as significant as we seem to think - will also propose life in community in a renewed way but always on the basis that one understands one's baptism as daily immersion in the life of the Holy Spirit who makes Christ real for us.