

Fr. Vien's words...

The following is the reflection that Fr. Vien Nguyen, SCJ, newly elected provincial superior of the US Province, gave to members of the Election Assembly the morning of January 5, 2022:

Thank you for entrusting me with the ministry of provincial superior. Thank you, Jack Kurps, for recruiting me when I first discerned my vocation with the Priests of the Sacred Heart. As I mentioned yesterday, my gratitude goes to my formators who taught me to breathe the SCJ spirituality and charism. I am grateful to many of you who have formed me in so many ways to become an SCJ.

For those who have reservations about me, I ask you to give me the benefit of the doubt. I ask for your prayers. And I ask you to help me be successful because my success is our success.

The experience of being elected reminds me of my experience with my mom. Many years ago, my mom and I traveled to Vietnam from Houston, Texas, via Beijing, China. After 15 hours on the airplane, my mom was tired and disoriented. As we approached Beijing, my mom leaned to me and asked: "Son, Is there a Chinatown in China?" I responded respectfully: "Mom, all of China is a Chinatown."

If confirmed as provincial I know there will be moments of disorientation. And there will be many sleepless nights when I think about the province. Fr Tom Cassidy reminded me yesterday about what Pope St. John XXIII said before going to bed: "It's your church, Lord. I am going to bed." Whatever the circumstances will be, I know our spirituality will keep me strong.

Although leadership responsibilities can be overwhelming, I know that I am not doing this alone. I will have the Council and you to help me foster spiritual vitality and fraternal care for members and co-workers in our province.

Having read the State of the Province and having heard from you, I want to share what I would like to work on with the Council and you. I organize my thoughts under three headings: (1) Remembering the Past, (2) Celebrating the Present, and (3) Preparing for the Future.

Remembering the Past

We look to the past with grateful hearts. To borrow the words of Sister Joan Chittister, our brother SCJs went where there was no trail and left a path. Guided by the Holy Spirit, our Founder, our pioneers, and many generations of American SCJs responded boldly and courageously to the cries of the poor and the needs of the Church. We are blessed to stand on the shoulders of giants and to walk in their path.

The year 2023 is the centennial anniversary of the first SCJ ministry in the United States. We will form a committee to help us prepare for this momentous occasion. We will strive to rediscover or reawaken the apostolic creativity of the founding members of the province and the Congregation. The centennial is a time for us to deepen our charism and spirituality. I envision us having spiritual renewal programs, conferences and retreats.

Celebrating the Present

We celebrate the commitment and wisdom of our elders who have dedicated their whole lives to God, and to others. In my Asian culture, and this is also true in South American and African cultures, our elders are held in high respect. They bring wisdom, dependability, and loving care. To our elders in the community, you have my utmost respect. Please continue to pray, support, and inspire our younger members. We will consult with you on issues and matters concerning the province. We will continue to provide the best care for you and pay attention to your needs and concerns.

We celebrate our diversity in community life. Our province is becoming more international and intercultural. We are a mirror of our Congregation and of the world today. We will strive to embrace the gifts and talents that we all bring to this province. We will find new ways of being community together. The administration will work closely with local superiors to promote intentional intercultural living and to strengthen relationships and communications among members. We will make sure that everyone in the province finds himself at home among us, no matter what culture he is from.

We celebrate the richness of our ministry. As a province, we want to know how our brothers are doing in our apostolates. What are the challenges they face and the joys they encounter in ministry? How can the province help our brothers maintain their enthusiasm and vibrancy in ministry and in community? What do they need to live the joy of the Gospel? As a province, we care about our co-workers, the laity. How are our co-workers embodying our SCJ spirituality in their ministerial roles? What can the province do to prepare or empower them to spread our SCJ charism and spirituality?

Preparing for the Future

We will identify and prepare SCJs for various positions in the province, such as finance, vocation work, formation, spiritual direction, justice and peace, and immigration. I concur with you about preparing someone to study and help us retrieve our charism and spirituality. We will work with superiors of other entities in the Congregation to help us by sending SCJs who have missionary zest and who are passionate about embodying Christ's love.

Pope Francis said at the recent extraordinary Synod on the Family: “God is not afraid of new things.” Here the Pope encourages creative imagination and innovation. I see the need for creative use of the media to reach people in the US and beyond. We are encouraged to read, discern, and respond to the signs of the times in our day. As our province grows smaller in size and older in age, we see greater involvement of the laity in our apostolates. We will analyze, discuss, and explore different management approaches for the laity to ensure that our charism and spirituality remain vibrant and our ministry exciting. Some of you mentioned new ministries that excite the whole province. I am on board with the idea. The administration will explore possibilities of serving and bringing vibrancy and excitement.

On a personal note, as for members of the Council, I will work collaboratively with whomever you elect. I would ask the councilors to challenge me to protect and promote the charism of the Founder, to promote dialogue and cohesiveness between communities and among members, to listen to and respect the diverse voices in our province and our apostolates, be attentive to those in the province whose voices and presence are often neglected, and to be a genuine pastor to our brother SCJs and co-workers.

These are some examples of my thoughts, hopes, and visions for the province. The administration will have some time to reflect on and process what you have said and hoped for.

Please pray for me that I have the ear to listen attentively to the different voices in the province, the eye to see clearly the direction for the province, and the heart to be pastoral and compassionate to all.

I want to conclude with an adaptation of the words that Fr. Tony Russo sent me: Our Founder and pioneer US SCJs have given us the torch. Let’s take the torch and walk forward together.

Thank you for listening.