



Vision paper AMI 2018-2021

Theme: Expanding Circles

0. PREAMBULE

Following the leadership change on January 1, 2018, the new AMI Executive Committee evaluated the position of AMI in a turbulent world--which has more insecurity, changing roles for the military, religious developments worldwide and increasing individualism. We reflected with our AMI community, the Vatican, Military Ordinariates and others; we listened carefully and came to the conclusion that the Statutes of AMI still serve their purpose, but a vision paper would give guidance to make AMI even more relevant and functional. Such a short paper would be pragmatic, putting the individual catholic soldier in the center of our focus, and at the same time positioning AMI ready to deal with questions of war and peace on the strategic level.

AMI truly wants to position itself in close proximity to the soldier, help foster an intercultural dialogue, and promote awareness among soldiers that they are (1) one family, which is loved, (2) one community, that is building (peace), and that they are (3) one church spreading the Gospel—and that they are doing all of this even at the ultimate sacrifice of their lives.

1. INTRODUCTION

a. HISTORY

Catholic military personnel of 10 countries founded AMI in Santiago de Compostela in Spain in 1965. They felt the need for a means of disseminating and putting into practice the ideals of Catholic military personnel both in the armed forces and in public life, encouraging all those devoted to serving their

homeland and doing their duty in a manner that will truly help to bring peace. AMI is officially recognized by the Holy See as a Catholic International Organization and is a member of the Conference of International Catholic Organizations (ICO) and the Forum of Catholic Inspired NGO's.

b. IDENTITY

The purposes of AMI (Art.2, AMI statutes) are:

- To promote at the national and international level the affirmation of a Christian vision of military life and of the values that characterize this vision.
- To promote and support international understanding and cooperation, as a contribution to strengthening peace in the world.
- To study together, in the light of the Gospel and the teachings of the Church, the spiritual, moral and social problems peculiar to the military sphere.
- To keep an open mind towards ecumenical work.
- To make known the activities of AMI in countries or to associations and organizations who are not yet members.

In the pursuit of these objectives, AMI shall make use of:

- International meetings and events (congresses, pilgrimages etc.)
- Continuous exchange of ideas and experiences (documents, periodicals, social media, etc.)
- Representation on international bodies.

The ideals of AMI have been expressed a number of times - updated - in so-called statements. The last two were:

- The Catholic Soldier at the Beginning of the Third Millennium Declaration of Rome, 2000;
- The Christian Soldier in the Service of Just Peace - Declaration of Berlin, October 2010.

They are available on the AMI website:

<http://www.ami-international.org/declaration.html> .

c. ORGANIZATION

AMI is a lay organization, governed by the General Assembly of delegates made up of the Executive Committee and the delegates of the member associations, which meets once a year. The Executive Committee (EC) is elected by the General Assembly and consists of the President, the Secretary General and Ecclesiastical Assistant, to manage day-to-day affairs and relations with other

international organizations and with the Holy See. AMI presently has 14 active affiliated (full) members and 6 active associated members.

2. PRINCIPLES

The documents of the Catholic Church, particularly those from the Second Vatican Council and the Catechism and any subsequent elaborations, together with our statutes as an NGO, form our identity and give us the legitimacy to act.

A preliminary issue is whether we start from a Catholic point of view or a Christian point of view? The Preamble of the AMI statutes is clear about this: 'The Apostolat Militaire International (AMI) has been active since 1965, uniting Christians from many different countries and examining how the profound message of peace and universal human kinship that the Church offers might best be advanced by Christians serving in the armed forces of the world.' From that perspective we are faithfully Catholic, but continue to welcome a respectful exchange of views with other Christians.

3. ANALYSIS

a. CURRENT APPROACH

Up until now AMI has operated as follows: through the year the contacts are within the presidency, leading to networking activities aimed at broadening the base (for example encouraging more countries to become involved as a full AMI member) and preparing for the annual international conference. In addition, this core group discussed some very interesting topics--often with a high scientific content--and put considerable effort into spreading the AMI message as widely as possible. They also strove to maintain relations with The Holy See in Rome and various UN organizations and NGOs.

In fact, the AMI Executive Committee wants to be active on both tracks: Reaching the individual soldier and at the same time participating with other entities on a strategic level.

But without robust contact with the military at its base, the AMI activities will have less impact. Until now this base (the individual soldier) seemed to be more or less unreachable—with only very limited military personnel involved in AMI or even know what AMI stands for. Indeed, it is essential for AMI to know what the ordinary soldier is looking for, how he or she experiences his or her work from the perspective of the Roman Catholic faith and with what (life) questions he or she struggles in that context.

On the other hand, it has also proven very valuable to be visible and active in

the various international forums that AMI has access to because of its NGO status. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that AMI is not yet invited to be a participant in strategic discussions about questions of war, conflict and peace--in contrast to an organization such as Pax Christi International, whose members are not at all involved in military life. AMI is not made aware of any agendas nor invited at the relevant tables to discuss issues and use our expertise—even though AMI and its military support are pre-eminently the interlocutor to advise on generic issues of military life; as well as on issues at a strategic level such as about war and peace, living the social teaching of the church, or the legitimate use of violence for a greater cause.

That is the unique selling point of AMI:

Connecting Catholic soldiers and the church; thus connecting the global world of Defense with the global world of the Church. AMI can explain the vision of the church about war and peace (as it is lived out on the ground) to both the military as well as the clergy.

b. THE WAY AHEAD

Though former methods of encouragement in the faith arose from and centered around direct contact (yearly reunions fostering camaraderie) and uplifting speakers to strengthen the faith—which then was brought back to national organizations and “cascaded” down to the individual soldier, the Executive Committee of AMI feels that we also need something that reaches individual soldiers quicker, because they are blasted daily by instantaneous distractions.

It is therefore important that we place the individual catholic soldier in the center. This fits very well with the approach of our current Pope Francis, who places a great deal of emphasis on the pastoral side of contact with believing Catholics/Christians.

AMI has a lot to offer to the individual catholic soldier:

- On issues on norms and values, like the contrast between the question: man of the sword versus you "though shall not kill";
- International camaraderie;
- Solidarity;
- Reconciliation between military, with how one may have acted, between conflicting beliefs and between old enemies;
- Moral responsibility in executing their military tasks;
- The Real Meaning of life;
- Reflection on their performance during missions;
- Freedom of belief as soldier;

- Freedom of conscience and
- Reintegration (and helping families to accept them) after each mission and at the conclusion of one's career.

In view of experiences gained in the past, it is important to adapt the way of communicating with this target group to what the modern age offers.

Short, compact statements, Whatsapp messages, tweets and images with short texts now replace books, long texts and explanations.

It is important to realize that the behavior of military personnel has an effect on their environment and vice versa. For example, the ban on cluster weapons has an effect on the behavior of the military (how should they deal with it) and the way in which soldiers, during their missions, deal with refugees has an effect on how the outside world looks at the military.

AMI also has much to offer to organizations:

In addition to unlocking faith for military personnel, AMI can help church leaders "frame" their teaching in those areas one may want to make people morally aware. Apostolate means looking from the church towards the world and intervening, without having to turn one's back on the church. As an organization for lay apostolate, AMI also has a task towards 'the world', and not only towards Christian / Catholic soldiers. This task involves matters such as the Nuclear Ban Treaty (supported by Pope Francis) and compliance with and enforcement of human rights by military personnel (a high priority according to the Dicastery for the promotion of integral human development, formerly Justice and Peace, led by Cardinal Turkson).

It is important to share the knowledge gained with the highest levels, so that there is also a clear understanding of what is going on among the Christian soldiers and that this can be taken into account in any further development of ideas or policies

Indeed, AMI can explain the vision of the church to the individual soldier and explain the reality of living in the military to the church officials.

4. VISION: EXPANDING CIRCLES

a. THE INDIVIDUAL SOLDIER

Our focus is Information Exchange and Encouragement in the faith.

To achieve that, we can use a multi-faceted approach of concentric circles of

activity.

First circle

It begins with the individual soldier, with his/her own norms and values, own thoughts and own experiences.

Second circle

Individual soldiers live in a network of family and friends dealing with many relevant issues, the second circle.

Third circle

The third circle is their working environment: the military organizations and their associations, including the military ordinariate. In all three of these circles Military Chaplains are often the first ones to listen to and support the individual soldier in his/her worries and questions.

Fourth circle

National pride, culture and governance are important for the individual soldier for he/she serves his nation and its people. Nations--the fourth circle--operate together to deliver peace.

Fifth circle

Multinational organizations--the fifth circle--provide the resolutions to act upon and the Vatican provides a framework for questions on war and peace. Here is where one can find a strategic and global perspective affecting the individual soldier.

Such concerns, which AMI might raise more effectively than an individual soldier can, include:

- How to reintegrate military personnel as they return from a deployment;
- Methods that encourage suicide prevention;
- Ways to develop tools to prevent a divorce.

At a higher level we can think of AMI's unique contribution to the promotion of freedom of religion and belief within the military and, as an elaboration of it, the support of chaplains services around the world.

b. THE STRATEGIC LEVEL

AMI sees opportunities accessible to itself at the highest level, in its role as an NGO, from a military Catholic background.

AMI can be of use serving the Vatican, Nations, NGO's and Multinational Organizations like the UN and the OSCE.

Such advice can be helpful in three categories:

- Delivering the military context.
- Participating in the development of contemporary Catholic teaching on (just) war and peace.
- Inserting real life topics from soldiers to the strategic level.

Advice can be given in various ways: re-active and pro-active, written or verbal.

Our idea is to establish a pool of advisors out of the AMI participants whose key competences include all the following: military experience, a Catholic/Christian background, fluency in English, and are communicative, diplomatic and analytical.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We will launch an AMI app to communicate with the individual soldier, with daily encouragement as well as insights about the contemporary world challenges facing our military members and their families. Though these will be short “bites” they will have connecting links to our AMI website and a digital magazine with deeper explanations of Catholic principles involved.
2. We will start Quarterly Discussions through e-mail, Skype, Face time or regional groups who can meet each other on a regular basis.
As such this allows an on-going investigation of the deep Catholic concerns faced by our youngest military—to stimulate a growth in faith. Some of these groups can also be developed into expert groups that can be pushed forward to support specific discussions and add expertise in developing a vision on certain topics.
3. We will continue our annual general assembly, which offers the chance for networking among individuals and support for fledgling national or religious organizations. The shared information at those meetings will still cascade back down to the operational activities of both national groups and individual soldiers, embodying Catholic solutions to shared problems. (For example, how one country in Africa has been handling refugees has given insight to our European members facing a parallel problem; or how one nation integrates family life has helped other nations form their vision and methodology.)
4. Through such discussions and liaisons to subcommittees of the Vatican

organizations, UN offices, and even university faculties, Access to Exerts within the military and with a deep Catholic background will become available to those who wish to make use of such a sounding board.

With a strong dependence on Almighty God, who is the supreme commander of all that exists, we propose this vision, the Action Plan and a timeline that follows:

1. Development of a strategic communication plan;
2. Development and maintenance of the AMI app;
3. Initiating such quarterly discussions: timing, sign-in criteria, topics & resources;
4. Determining the progression of liaison connections, and with which of the international offices to begin;
5. Planning and executing each annual general assembly, including determining the host countries;
6. Coordinating with associations—both of soldiers and their families—within nations.

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The Netherlands transferred the general secretariat of AMI to Italy on 1 January 2018. The new secretary-general of AMI, Colonel Domenic D'Ortenzi, works at the Italian Defense Staff in Rome. His deputy is Cap Mario Ciccotti and AMI's new treasurer is the Italian adjutant-petty officer Damiano Pandolfo.

In effect from 1 January 2018, Vice Admiral RNLN (ret.) Matthieu Borsboom, former Commander of the Netherlands Navy, is the new President. He took over the position of Major General (ret.) Norbert Sinn from Austria. The new president has two vice presidents to assist him: Captain RNLN (ret) Frank Marcus, former director of the Dutch Veterans Institute, and Staffadjutant RNLA Ferry Thannhauser.

On behalf of the Vatican Father Patrick Dolan, PhD, STD (USA) has been appointed as spiritual advisor. In addition, the president can appeal to the theological expertise of Prof. dr. Fred van Iersel. Former secretary-general of AMI and general manager of the NKT, Nelleke Swinkels-van de Vorst, is in the current presidency, as liaison officer and responsible for AMI's strategic communications.