October 2007 GS NGO Prayer Network:
International Languages
2008 will be the International Year of Languages

The General Assembly of the UN has proclaimed 2008 the International Year of Languages. This designation is in recognition that “genuine multilingualism promotes unity in diversity and international understanding…” The UN has a practical aim of eliminating the disparity between the six official UN languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

“Inculturation requires new expressions and lots of room for freedom...
We also need a common language of convenience so we can communicate among the different cultures.”

Inculturating the Gospel and Consecrated Life
Congress 2004 Response, UISG Bulletin

Good Shepherd, as an international organization, has spent time evaluating how our language use can promote unity in diversity and international understanding. With direction from the last Assembly/Chapter and consultation with the congregation, we maintain three congregational languages while having established English as a link language. As noted by the Congregational Leadership team, this has posed challenges and makes demands on both those who speak English as a first language and those who are required to learn English for communication. It is acknowledged that there are also political issues within language communication.

The GS International NGO office is aware of these challenges, demands and hopes, especially in the coming transition period of 2008. It is most important in NGO and JP work to be aware of the importance of international languages. We ask you to join in prayer so that with common awareness, patience and consideration we can improve our international understanding for the sake of the mission. We also pray that all misunderstanding be reconciled.

Some language facts for contemplation:

There are over 6,800 known languages spoken in 200 countries of the world. (192 nations belong to the UN.)

The congregational languages are among international languages with over 100 million speakers who use the language as either 1st or 2nd language:

- English has 508 million people who speak it as a 1st or 2nd language.
- Spanish has 382 million people who speak it as a 1st or 2nd language.
- French has 115 million people who speak it as a 1st or 2nd language.
Other languages with large population usage are:
- Mandarin: 1,051 million persons speak it as a 1st or 2nd language.
- Arabic: 452 million persons speak it as a 1st or 2nd language.
- Portuguese: 192 million persons speak it as a 1st or 2nd language.
- Indonesian: 163 million persons speak it as a 1st or 2nd language.
- German: 123 million persons speak it as a 1st or 2nd language.
- Japanese: 123 million persons speak it as a 1st or 2nd language.

In addition, most countries where GS is present use multiple languages with in the country. For some examples, there are:
- 742 languages spoken in Indonesia;
- 427 languages spoken in India;
- 297 languages spoken in Mexico;
- 200 languages spoken in Brazil;
- 104 languages spoken in Viet Nam;
- 134 languages spoken in Sudan;
- 145 languages spoken in Canada;
- 66 languages spoken in France;
- 64 languages spoken in Kenya.

Suggestions for your prayer:

Explore the language usage in your country. You can explore here:
<http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/cultural/language/index.shtml>
Or/ use your library.

Make a poster of the language usages in your community or province or country – how many languages are spoken? How many sisters are fluent in at least two congregations languages? How many sisters are fluent in other languages? Reflect and discuss the meaning of languages in your community.

Prepare communal prayer sessions in a language less familiar to you. Recite scripture or psalms, together with your community, in other than your 1st or 2nd language. It may sound faltering and be uncomfortable; this is the reality for many who learn new languages. Your pray in another language can be an act of solidarity. The website <http://www.biblegateway.com/> can help you easily locate any scripture passage in other languages.

*This prayer note was prepared by Clare Nolan.*)