We live in communion with the Roman Catholic Church recognizing that our place in the Church is on the margin, in solidarity and availability among the people, freely renouncing any sense of power or prestige, and witnessing to the ideals of the first gospel community.

[From A Description of the Xaverian Charism as lived by the Brothers, July 2012]

The Congregation will only flourish and produce great fruit if it is concerned with the preservation of its vocation which, it seems to me, has been proven by clear signs and consists, I think, in laboring at the formation of a good and Christian coming generation for the whole Church. In order to reach that lofty purpose, it seems to me that it is most necessary, within the limits of recognition and respect for the canonical rights of the Bishop, that we have freedom to act, so that we can work and live according to the spirit of our foundation and Constitution; that we are not hampered nor that our hands are bound; that we do not pursue the well-being of one diocese and are not obliged by a bishop, who is usually only concerned with the good of his diocese, to bind ourselves to the local well-being. If we did so, we might forego the vocation of the Congregation and of its individual members.

[Letter of T.J. Ryken, Brugge, to Bishop Jan Baptist Malou, Brugge, 28 June 1854]

The Theme Communion from the Margins situates the Xaverian Way in relation to other roles in the church. It finds its roots in the deep roots of religious life and of those early religious who sought a form of sequela Christi (following Christ) that was deeply attuned to the calls of the Gospel, but away from an emerging ecclesiastical leadership which was increasingly becoming privileged and entitled. In spite of this chosen
distancing from Church leadership, the early religious did not equate being “set apart” with being closer to God than other members of Christ’s faithful (Working Paper, June 2012, p. 57).

In the lay movement of the Late Middle Ages in the Netherlands, known as the Devotio Moderna, which influenced Theodore James Ryken and the region of Holland where he grew up, the “Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life” sought to live a radical form of discipleship that stood in stark contrast to the hypocritical life led by many professed monks and nuns, as well as by priests and bishops. Through their life of piety and the living of “ordinariness” they lived a non-dichotomized life of contemplation and action. It was their spirituality that was embedded into the spiritual life of Theodore Ryken.

To reflect on Communion from the Margins, first invites us to think about the witness that those who follow the Xaverian Way can give by incorporating into our lives the practices, necessary and appropriate to our distinct ways of life, that help us to “make the Word our home” and to “manifest God’s care and compassionate love to those who are separated and estranged, not only from their neighbors, but also from their own uniqueness.” (Xaverian Fundamental Principles) Secondly, reflecting on Communion from the Margins challenges us to think of our place within the church and in relation to other members. We can first consider how our life and charismatic identity calls us to give form and witness to the non-hierarchical dimensions of the church. We can also consider the dialogical relationship with hierarchical leadership, which should serve to build up the Body of Christ.

During this Fifth Week of Lent, when the scripture readings invite us to reflect on the Lord God’s intervention in the world – the paths opened for us (Isaiah 43:16), the compassion and mercy offered to us (John 8:11), the promise made to us: “If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples” (John 8:31) – we can see how as followers of the Xaverian Way, we, from our marginal place in the church, can be in communion with a wider church as well as witnesses who allow ourselves to be “given away as nourishment for others, as bread that is broken” (Xaverian Fundamental Principles).