

Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ

45TH GENERAL CHAPTER

Rome – October 2006

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**General Secretariat
Rome - January 2007**

Letter of introduction

Dear religious, sisters and brothers of the Passionist Family,

“Let us go to meet the Lord who is coming.” The prayer and the liturgy of these days have repeatedly invited it to “seek” the Lord, to follow in his footsteps to find him and to celebrate with him.

Throughout Advent Mary has accompanied us, she who “traveled to the hill country in haste” (Lk. 1:39), immediately after the Annunciation, humbly awaiting her Son.

Together with Joseph, her spouse, “[they] went up from Galilee” to Bethlehem for the census. The Lord would be born in a stable for animals “because there was no room for them in the inn.” The all powerful Creator of heaven and earth who governs the universe and measures out time, the “Son of the Most High” to whom “the Lord God will give the throne of David and he will reign forever” is wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger (Lk. 2:7). We recall the feelings of tenderness and affection of St. Paul of the Cross when, during the procession of Christmas Midnight Mass, he gazed upon the image of the Christ Child, bound in swaddling clothes. It was similar to his experience of contemplating the picture that he had in his room of the Child Jesus sleeping on the cross.

In Bethlehem his throne was a feeding trough for animals; on Calvary it will be the cross, as he listens to the tormenting of the evildoers: “If he were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you” (Jn.18:30). Bethlehem and Calvary reveal the same face of God. With respect to the power and glory that he previously possessed, this is a new image. From the moment of his birth, He dies to himself. Whereas human beings tend to exalt themselves, writes von Balthasar, the Word of God wants to humble himself. And He even “wanted to descend to such depths that every fall would have occurred within Him”, because one cannot fall any lower; there was no room; He had descended to the lowest depths possible.

To be conformed to Christ, therefore, means overcoming the deep tendency in us to seek prominence rather than choosing humility. This is the meaning of the conversion that is expressed in the doctrine of spiritual infancy: “Unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt. 18:3) Jesus invites his disciples who want to become the greatest in the Kingdom of God to become servants and the least. There is no spirituality of charity that does not presuppose a spirituality of abasement.

“Let us go to meet the Lord who is coming.” Humbling oneself is about going beyond ourselves so as to be able to find him and recognize him: “So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger,” as they had been told. (Lk.2:18) The “sign” of the glory of God would be “an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger” as will be the “sign” of Jesus’ death on the cross and his Resurrection: “This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it, except the sign of Jonah.” (Lk.11:29)

It is Jesus’ reprimand of those who will not believe and who cannot recognize him. It is the same incredulity of the two disciples who were “on the road” to Emmaus and whose “eyes were prevented from recognizing him.” (Lk.24:16) “Were not our hearts burning (within us) while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?”, the disciples would say after “their eyes were opened and they recognized him.”

Jesus could also refer to us as “foolish” and “slow...to believe”, if we do not have the eyes and heart to recognize him as he walks with us in our personal history and the history of the Congregation. Listening and conversion are necessary; going beyond ourselves and the securities of religious life that have been attained over the years. “Behold, I make all things new”, the Lord says to us with the breath of the Spirit that moves all things.

An important event for the Congregation was the General Chapter that was celebrated in Rome last October from the 1st to the 21st. It was a Chapter which we should now read and understand from the perspective of Advent and the birth of Jesus -- “today is born in the city of David, a Saviour who is Christ the Lord” (Lk.2:11) – and from the perspective of the possibility of a new birth for us in Him.

So why is there still so much hesitation, so much doubt? Let us go “in haste” as did Mary after the Annunciation, as did the shepherds in order “to find” the Child; “let us depart in haste” and with the enthusiasm of the disciples of Emmaus: “The Lord is truly risen” and he is alive in our midst. The commitment to the process of Restructuring to which we have been called by the Chapter, will be an expression of our change of heart. It concerns leaving and proceeding “in haste” with the remodeling and revitalizing of the Congregation.

The Principal Decree of the Chapter itself that will guide us during the next six years is a call to a new way of reflecting, of dialoging and of interaction. This response to the call of God will help us to address today’s problems in a more adequate way and to create conditions for healthy development and growth for tomorrow. There are two phases for this work: one phase, internally, within each Province, Vice-Province or Vicariate and the other phase externally, of interaction between the various entities and regions. It may be that the next two years will not be sufficient to complete the phase of the planned process; however, it will be useful for sharing about what has taken place thus far in the process at the General Synod of 2008.

A role and task of particular importance and responsibility in the process of Restructuring belongs to the Provincial Superiors, the Vice- Provincials and the Regional Vicars, i.e. their ministry as pastors and guides. They can fulfill the plans of God for the Congregation by means of their dedication and availability.

It will be essential to take into consideration the 10 priorities that were decided upon by the General Chapter and in their light, to verify and evaluate the matter itself and devise a plan that will be open to the reality of the other provinces that in the future may possibly lead to territorial entities that are different from the current reality. The upcoming provincial chapters may offer opportunities for chapter planning that reflects the Principal Decree of the Chapter and the 10 priorities.

During the next two years the General Council will facilitate the process through listening and dialog. And it is in this spirit of collaboration in the process of Restructuring that the General Council would be willing, when possible, to participate in some meetings of the Conferences.

Together with this letter you will receive the Principal Decree of the Chapter and the 10 priorities, the approved proposals and the work of the Chapter commission that emerged from the dialogue that took place in the aula about the Charism, the Mission and Restructuring. The remaining documentation of the General Chapter – the Acts, the conferences, report, accounts and homilies are in the preparatory phase and will be sent as soon as they are ready. We will make every effort to publish the essential documents of the Chapter in the eleven languages in use in the Congregation. I remind the provincial superiors and the economes about the decree which requires the major superiors to facilitate the study of foreign languages for those religious who so desire, but especially for the young.

The choices of the Chapter have modified the General Council and this will necessitate, as an immediate consequence, a reordering of the responsibilities of the Consultors and of their work and the reorganization of the Curia, of its offices and the Secretariat. We are also considering a reorganization of the area of Communications and the Web site. We will continue with this planning during the next Consulta that will take place in Rome from 10 to 15 February 2007, which will also address the approved proposals, the commissions and the recommendations.

The urgency of the events and the ordinary life of the Provinces – in 2007 ten provincial chapters will be celebrated together with the respective canonical visitations, all of which are grouped in the first seven months of the year – has compelled us to decide upon the individuation of four pastoral zones that will be the responsibility of a General Consultor: Africa (CPA) and North Europe (NECP) – *Fr. Denis Travers*; Latin America (COPAL) and Italy (CIPI) – *Fr. Luis Alberto Cano Seijo*; North America (IPCM) and Spain (CII) – *Fr. Luigi Vaninetti*; Asia and the Pacific (PASPAC) – *Fr. Clemente Barron*.

We are also in the process of studying where applicable on a functional and practical level whether the Consultors would also be responsible for two or more of the 10 areas of priority that were named by the General Chapter.

The canonical visitations will not always be carried out by the Consultor who is responsible for the area; instead it may be done by another Consultor or by another religious apart from the Council or the General Curia. We will be guided by the principle of “*functional flexibility*”. In reference to these canonical visitations, we are evaluating a new way of doing them with the help, where possible and in a way yet to be determined, of the General Econome for the economic and financial areas.

Furthermore, in order to make the process of Restructuring more efficacious with regard to what is already occurring and its ongoing development, the Chapter has decided upon an internal **Coordinator** in each of the areas. The Coordinator will not possess any juridical authority; however his responsibility will be to guide the area itself in reference to the process of Restructuring and to be in communication with the General Council.

It will be the task of the Conferences, as soon as possible, but at least by next May 2007, to name a Coordinator for its area and to communicate this decision to the General Council. It will also be the responsibility of the Conferences themselves to see that their own legislation conforms to the new composition of the General Council that no longer allows for a Consultor to be chosen specifically for that area.

My dear religious and brothers and sisters of the Passionist Family, we are living in an important moment in the life of the Congregation and for each of us. The Principal Decree of the 45th General Chapter, which serves as the heart and the keystone of the Chapter itself, impels us to “enthusiastically” carry out the process of Restructuring. Through discernment you can see that it is a call from God to deepen the commitment of the Congregation to the *Memoria Passionis*. Fidelity to the work of the Spirit that impels us is expressed in a **new way**, of “**reflecting**”, of “**interacting**” among ourselves and of acknowledging the possibility of “**recreating**” the structures and the institutions that are at the service of our charism.

This involves conversion in the acceptance of these new initiatives and by discussing, with openness of mind and heart, long-standing certainties and ways of thinking and of living.

By means of the choice of the 10 priorities that were named and the sectors of particular responsibility for the Congregation, **the Chapter has decreed that every Province, Vice-Province and Vicariate develop a “plan” for its own life and mission**; by “plan” we mean a project for life and commensurate choices. The “plans”

should be shared regionally and then with the Congregation. It will be the responsibility of the General Council to promote the coordination so that all the parts of the Congregation interact among themselves. The next Synod will verify the status of the process and will indicate the successive steps to be taken.

Before concluding I wish to remind you of a specific task that must be undertaken by the Provincials and their Councils within the next six months: *“Every Province and Vice-Province will study the proposals of the General Econome in his report to the Chapter and will offer suggestions to the General Council within six months.”* (Proposal 10, 2nd paragraph)

It is already Christmas and I would like to take the opportunity to wish a peaceful holiday season and a Happy New Year 2007 to all the religious of the Congregation dispersed in 57 nations and to the Passionist Family in the hope and prayer that the world will rediscover peace. It seems that the song of the angels on Christmas night is not heard: “peace on earth to men and women of good will”. Let us commit ourselves to realize this peace in our communities, our families and in our relationships with each other: let us offer and accept forgiveness and ask the Lord for the same in the song of the *Te Deum* at the end of the year. It is a concrete way of spreading the “culture of peace” that is the daughter of love and of justice. I especially remember all of the sick, the young religious of the Congregation and our families.

25 December 2006
The Nativity of the Lord

Fr. Ottaviano D’Egidio, CP
Superior General

PRINCIPAL DECREE OF THE 45TH GENERAL CHAPTER

Introduction

The 45th General Chapter enthusiastically commits the Congregation to proceed with the process of Restructuring that was begun at the General Synod of 2004 and which will continue at least until the next General Chapter. This commitment is undertaken in order to promote the life and vitality of the Congregation and in order to more effectively respond to the Gospel mandate and to our Passionist vocation: to proclaim the message of the Cross in today's world.

The Chapter supports the plan of Restructuring for two reasons:

- First, because we have discerned the call of the Spirit of God from North and South, East and West, to more profoundly commit the Congregation to the *Memoria Passionis*. Our fidelity to the Passionist charism is sustained by the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church. It is in our lived experience of Church that we discover how to respond to the movement of the Holy Spirit, i.e. what are our life-giving memories and what are the realities that we wish to leave behind us because they are no longer adequate and/or life-giving.

The ineffable presence of the Holy Spirit, the giver of life, creates in us a charismatic experience of conversion which should be expressed in our life and mission in service to the world in which we live.

Faithful to the workings of the Spirit, we are offered a new way of reflecting on our life; a new way of *interacting* with each other and the possibility of *recreating* the structures and the institutions that are at the service of the charism.

This new mode of personal and community existence expresses the creative power of the Holy Spirit.

- Secondly, we recognize that the Spirit has already begun the process of Restructuring in many areas of the Congregation where new ways of responding to contemporary challenges already exist. The Chapter wishes to encourage and develop these initiatives throughout the Congregation. Some "structures" which in the past sustained the life of the Congregation must change if we wish to promote Passionist growth in the 21st century. The Chapter commits the Congregation to study and evaluate all of its priorities and needs, its strengths and its weaknesses. The Chapter believes that this will favor a greater appreciation of Passionist identity and will favor the development of a religious Congregation that is in fact more international and more effective for the Church of today and tomorrow.

The Decree

The Chapter has discerned ten priorities that will serve to guide our process of Restructuring on all levels. The Chapter decrees that every Province, Vice-Province and Vicariate develop a plan for the future of its life and mission.

In the process of developing this plan, every Province, Vice-Province and Vicariate can work independently or in collaboration with others, either within or beyond its own Region.

These plans will be shared on a regional basis. They will also be shared with the entire Congregation with the goal of providing a foundation for the next General Synod and for the next phase of Restructuring.

The General Government will be responsible for the process of Restructuring with regard to promoting provincial, inter-provincial and inter-regional coordination in the hope of proceeding in the most effective way possible, in particular to insure that all of the parts of the Congregation interact with each other. The Chapter especially underlined the importance of creative dialog between the older, historical areas of the Congregation and those that are more recent.

AREAS of PRIORITY

1. International Collaboration for Community Life and Mission

The General Chapter is convinced that in this process of Restructuring we must coordinate all of our resources in all of the Provinces, Vice-Provinces and Vicariates in order to bring about greater collaboration in Passionist life and apostolate. Although several steps have already been taken in this process, there is still much to be done. Restructuring offers the entire Congregation the opportunity to focus on our mission and to discern where to best use our resources. If we generously share personnel, financial resources and other elements we can greatly increase the assistance that we give to one another in carrying out our mission and it will serve as a means of exemplifying the spiritual communion that exists among us.

The creation of international Passionist communities is one way in which this collaboration can be expressed for community life and mission and it can be an important evangelical witness in a world that is characterized by ethnic and cultural tensions. The members of these communities should receive adequate preparation.

In the process of planning for collaboration in the various regions and areas of dialog we should also be mindful of the demands and the plans of the local Church in which we live and minister. It is important to remember that Passionists live and minister within the larger context of the Church.

2. Solidarity in the areas of personnel and finances

From the earliest days of our Congregation there has always existed a spirit of fraternal solidarity. As was stated above, the General Chapter again wishes to encourage a deep sense of solidarity among all the members of the Congregation. One of the primary objectives of Restructuring is a greater spirit of solidarity that is expressed in concrete ways. Individual religious as well as the Provinces, Vice-Provinces and Vicariates are invited to be mindful of the needs of the Congregation throughout the world. Every juridical entity is called to dialog with the other entities in order to share priorities and objectives and develop specific projects and the sharing of resources.

The General government will promote this sharing by developing more suitable means and more precise criteria for this purpose. One significant expression of this sharing is the Solidarity Fund. The local entities of the Congregation are called to dedicate themselves in concrete ways to the development of this fund. The General government will also consider the overall mission of the Congregation in order to encourage the religious to serve in diverse cultural contexts beyond the confines of their own province and nation.

3. A revision of the structures of government, communication and juridical entities.

One essential aspect of Restructuring involves the evaluation of the juridical entities and the governmental structures within the Congregation. The juridical entities within the Congregation are the Provinces, the Vice-Provinces and the Vicariates. The combination of these entities comprises the regional Conferences which presently total seven in the Congregation. According to our General Regulations the regional Conferences serve as means of promoting and organizing communication, cooperation and coordination between the various common areas of interest and the initiatives among these juridical Entities (#94). The regional Conferences possess no juridical authority of their own.

While some Provinces, Vice-provinces and regional Vicariates within the Congregation are experiencing a significant decrease in personnel, others, especially in the recently established jurisdictions, are enjoying a significant numerical increase in professed members and candidates. Many have expressed the desire that the Congregation reconfigure its own jurisdictions in order to facilitate greater solidarity and to promote our mission and our future. Some models of possible reconfiguration have already been proposed and are available for study. Other possible models can also be submitted for consideration.

The General Chapter calls the members of the Provinces, Vice-provinces and Vicariates to include discussion about the problems concerning the structures of government and the juridical Entities in their strategic planning. These studies on the Province, Vice-Province, Vicariate and Regional levels will take place within the process of Restructuring and will last until the next General Synod.

4. Formation

Formation was an important topic in the discussion of the General Chapter of 2006. Our concern for formation in Passionist life and apostolate is reflected in our preferential option for the young. The members of the Chapter believe that the Congregation must do everything possible to offer fundamental and effective formation to its new members. We are also committed to increase our efforts in the area of ongoing formation for our professed Passionists.

Among those who need opportunities for on-going formation are those religious who are ministering in the area of initial formation as well as those who minister in positions of leadership in the Congregation.

The Chapter urges provinces/vice-provinces/vicariates to evaluate the programs of initial formation which are already in place. They should pay close attention to the quality of Passionist life within the local community in which formation for new members takes place. Formation communities should be places where younger and senior religious can live together in mutual enrichment. They must be hospitable environments in which healthy, mature relationships among the religious can be fostered.

The Chapter also recommends the creation of structures for the mentoring of those religious who have recently professed perpetual vows and/or have been ordained.

The strategic planning that takes place in regional conferences should include exploration of ways in which entities within the Congregation can collaborate in the work of formation. These entities may wish to explore the possibility of establishing houses of formation that are international in character.

5. Commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

Another priority is that of commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation. This commitment is profoundly rooted in our charism. Our Constitutions express our desire “to share in the distress of all, especially those who are poor and neglected...” (Const.#3). We believe that the power of the Cross offers us the strength to discern and to alleviate the burden of suffering experienced by the poor and the marginalized of our world. The preferential option for the poor has a central role in the process of Restructuring, guiding us to channel and utilize our resources.

Furthermore, the ecological crisis of the world in which we live invites us to be concerned about the safeguarding and the protection of creation.

The commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation that is already present in various areas and apostolates of the Congregation should be integrated into all levels of planning in the Provinces, Vice-provinces and Vicariates including the area of initial formation. With this goal in mind, we must avail ourselves of the good use of available contacts and networks within the Congregation.

6. Collaboration with the Laity

Since the time of St. Paul of the Cross our Congregation has been blessed by the presence and support of many laymen and women who have shared in our charism in a variety of ways. In recent years, as the Church has recognized the fundamental role of the laity in the mission of proclaiming the Gospel, our collaboration with the laity has increased significantly. The General Chapter wishes to endorse this collaboration and asks that those who are responsible for planning on all levels include this topic in their strategic planning. The Laity of the Passionist Family who collaborate with us should be involved in the planning process. They should be present when the Provinces, the Vice-Provinces and the Vicariates develop their strategic plans and their input will be considered in regional dialog about strategic planning. The Provinces, Vice-Provinces and the Vicariates should study the ways in which the laity may become involved in our life and apostolate. Those in authority on Provincial, Vice-Provincial and Vicariate levels should also dialogue with the religious about the importance of collaboration with the laity.

The General and his Council will provide criteria for establishing various levels of participation for the laity who wish to share in our life.

7. Dialog with the world of culture and the arts and sciences.

In his Report to the General Chapter, Fr. Ottaviano D'Egidio, Superior General, highlighted the importance of culture as a vehicle for proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Through the years individual Passionists have enriched our life and mission through their involvement in the world of culture. Their talents have helped to disseminate the message of the Cross. The General Chapter considers dialog with culture to be a priority for the mission of the Congregation in our contemporary world.

In particular, artistic expression discloses levels of truth that transcend the limits of rational argumentation and practical reasoning. Our encounter with art and culture in all its forms engages the heart and not simply the mind. Beauty is a transcendental reality and as such is expressive of the nature of God. The Chapter also asks that those in positions of leadership within the Congregation encourage the cultivation of artistic interest and talent in the religious, particularly in those in initial formation.

8. Communications

In a world characterized by an ongoing revolution in communications, the General Chapter wishes to highlight this theme and to urge that it be given special attention in the process of strategic planning. Above all, local entities as well as regions should further the quality of communication among Passionists. This concern will also occur on the general level.

Because the knowledge of more than one language is essential to communication in the contemporary world and within our own Congregation, the provision of opportunities for our religious to learn other languages should be a dimension of strategic planning.

In order to proclaim the Good News of the crucified and risen Christ, it is important to know how to utilize television, radio, and the printed media, as well as the Internet. Use of the Internet as a means of evangelization is particularly important in our preferential option for youth. Significant progress in the use of these media has already been made in many areas of the Congregation. The General Chapter urges that there be new efforts in this field and that new ways of collaboration between provinces/vice-provinces/vicariates in the media ministry be explored.

9. Ecumenism and Inter-religious Dialogue

The Constitutions of the Congregation state that unity among all Christians is one of the chief concerns of the Church, and they call us to engage in ecumenical activities whenever possible (n. 74). This commitment to Christian ecumenism is rooted in the hopes and dreams of Saint Paul of the Cross, and it was expressed in a special way in the ministry of Blessed Dominic Barberi. The General Chapter calls the provinces/vice-provinces/vicariates and the regional conferences to incorporate this summons to work for the unity of Christians into their strategic planning. They should build upon the ecumenical activities that are already taking place.

In recent years, we have become more keenly aware that we live and minister in a religiously pluralistic world. Some Passionists live and work in areas of the world where Christians represent a small minority of the population. All of us are aware that the well being of the human family requires serious and sustained efforts to develop understanding between people of different faith traditions. The General Chapter calls the members of the Congregation to include the topic of this area of ministry, in which some of our religious are already engaged, in their planning for the future. All of us should strive to deepen our understanding of other faith traditions and take concrete steps toward promoting dialogue and cooperation with persons of these traditions.

10. Preferential Option for Youth.

The preferential option for young people has been a very important topic discussed at the General Chapter. We have felt a special urgency about the need to reach out more effectively to those who represent the future of the world and of the Church. This conviction is fully in accord with the important statements of recent popes and other Church authorities concerning a preferential option for the young. Accordingly, the General Chapter calls upon all the members of the Congregation to examine ways in which we can minister more effectively to young people in our mission throughout the world. These renewed efforts at evangelization of youth must be animated by a spirit of attentive listening to the needs and concerns of young people. We must invite youth to speak to us about their hopes and dreams, their fears and concerns, and their spiritual aspirations.

Conclusion

The General Chapter wishes to encourage all the members of the Congregation to take an active role in planning for our future. We believe that the areas of priority described above, while not exhaustive of the themes to be considered in strategic planning, are worthy of special attention. Careful and sustained reflection on these dimensions of Passionist life and mission will contribute significantly to the vitality of our Congregation now and in the future.

We profess our trust in the faithful and provident care of God for our Congregation. God blessed Saint Paul of the Cross with the wonderful gift of the Memoria Passionis. We believe that God will continue to pour out his gifts upon us and the people whom we serve. This confidence gives us a spirit of profound hope about the future of Passionist life and ministry.

Chapter discussion about the Charism, Mission and Restructuring

Introduction

This text summarises the Chapter's discussions on Chapter Objective One: "To enable a systematic process at the Chapter to encourage Capitulars so as to achieve a more profound understanding and commitment to Passionist unity."

The first week of the Chapter focussed on three related areas: our Charism, our Mission, and the Restructuring of our Congregation. Acknowledging that reflection on the meaning of the Passionist Charism creates great energy and enthusiasm, the Capitulars affirmed that a vision for the future must be based upon a deepened understanding of the Passionist Charism and that it must be an exercise that engages our hearts as well as our minds. The first three tasks for the Chapter were:

- 1) to reach a consensus on the key characteristics of our Charism;
- 2) to bring our Charism into dialogue with the world so as to shed light on what we are called to be and do for the future of the Congregation and its mission;
- 3) to reach a consensus on the meaning of restructuring so that we can meet the challenges of the future.

1) Our Passionist Charism

Centrality of the Experience of Saint Paul of the Cross

For Saint Paul of the Cross, the Passion of Jesus is the clearest expression of God's love.

Paul looked at the person of Jesus; he wished to be an image of Jesus, his Crucified Love.

He gathered companions to announce and keep alive the Memory of the Passion of Jesus, the sign of God's saving love for his people.

Paul of the Cross invites us to three things: to meditate on the sufferings of Jesus; to find meaning for our life through the Passion; to bring this meaning to others, inviting them to keep the Memory of the Passion of Jesus alive in their hearts. All our daily prayer, meditation, community life, and apostolate is an attempt to live and practice the Passion of Jesus as sign of God's love, as Saint Paul of the Cross did.

The Passionist Charism

The Passionist Charism is rooted in the experience of Saint Paul of the Cross; central to the Charism are the Passion of Jesus and the passion of humanity and of the earth. Our Charism is expressed clearly in the Constitutions and documents of Chapters.

The Passion of Jesus reveals the love of God for humanity. The *logos* of the Cross becomes the manifestation of the passion of the Father for humanity; thus, the Passion is the centre, the motive for our life. The love of God revealed on the Cross gives meaning to life; it gives meaning to *our* life.

The Memory of the Passion is the source and foundation of our lives as Passionists; this is what gives us our identity. This *Memoria Passionis* offers a meaning to life that is profound and enduring; it helps us to discover meaning even in situations of suffering and pain – moments that often appear to be devoid of meaning. The Charism of Saint Paul of the Cross helps us to celebrate life in the midst of death.

The two dimensions of the Charism are identification with Christ crucified and being present to the “crucified” of today. The Passionist Charism is not so much to be defined as to be lived and experienced, through contemplation, community life and mission; it is about loving, not about doing.

The Charism is a gift, but it also brings a responsibility. When it is lived in a serious way, it calls us to a transformation not just of our personal lives, but of the very structure of our Congregation. It is this light, the power of the Cross, which can transform our lives in a real way.

We have personal experiences which incarnate the Charism: being with the persecuted, the struggle for justice, the memory of the Crucified and the “crucified”, the centrality of the *Memoria Passionis*, pastoral life, prayer and contemplation, the encounter with Christ and the experience of being loved, the experience of peace and of suffering in the world.

The Charism is lived in Relationships

The Passionist Charism is a living reality which is dynamic, not static; this reality implies:

- the call to keep alive the Memory of the Passion which draws us to this community;
- the gift and challenge of life in community which leads us to deeper insight into the meaning of the love of God revealed in the crucified and risen Jesus;
- our experience in ministry, particularly with the poor and the crucified of today, which further deepens that insight and calls us to ongoing conversion;
- our struggles with our own personal pain and weakness which also invite us to embrace the Crucified One with greater openness and intensity.

The full richness of the Passionist Charism is found in community, for the Charism is not so much a reality of the intellect as it is about life and witness. We live the Charism, then, in our relationships: in our relationship with Jesus; in our relationship with our brothers in community, especially the young, the elderly, the sick; in our relationship with those to whom we minister, especially the most neglected and those who suffer; in ecumenical relationships which minister to the sufferings of the church caused by the absence of unity.

Charism and Mission

As Passionists, we are called to form relationships with the crucified of today, relationships that reflect the compassion of God revealed and effected in Jesus Christ. These relationships are sources of new life and healing for those we serve and for us.

Our ministries give expression to our Charism but they are not, in and of themselves, the Charism. The Charism is a deep life force which expresses itself in a variety of

ministries. It gives rise to a particular concern (a preferential option) for the poor, the marginalised, those searching for meaning, the endangered earth. The Passion of Christ illuminates certain aspects of life today and gives them meaning: situations of poverty, the need for solidarity, the struggle for justice, respect for the other, dialogue with other religions.

We can reflect on how the Passionist Charism is incarnated in the diversity of cultures and social situations in which Passionists live and minister. We must continue to find ways to proclaim the kenotic love of God manifested and effected in the Crucified One to people of all cultures, while also allowing them to proclaim this same message to us. We can collaborate to eliminate social and economic structures which delay the building up of God's kingdom.

Our Constitutions (number 65) give a synthesis of the relationship between our Charism and our Mission. In living our Mission, we do not lose sight of the "life like the apostles", the community dimension, and the balance between contemplation and mission.

Difficulties in Witnessing to the Charism

We need to be aware of what can cloud our Charism's visibility and know how to respond to it. Often we think we are living the Charism, but people cannot see it. If we witness to the message of the Cross without responding to the basic needs of the people, our witness can be difficult for others to understand and accept. We need to ask ourselves what kind of witness our lifestyle gives to ordinary or poor people.

The Passionist Charism has a great potential, but at times it can be difficult to continue being creative with it. We have today a number of generic apostolates where our Charism is less clear, but we can also carry out even our most characteristic ministries, in ways which do not communicate the Charism. As well as accompanying people in their suffering, we need to learn how to live solidarity in situations of the absence, the silence of God.

Our Charism is for mission, but mission is not just activism; it implies presence. Presence with others and to others is a way in which we promote the *Memoria Passionis*.

Formation in the Passionist Charism

It is easy to speak about the Charism, but difficult to live it; we are called to accept it every day in living faith. We need to make the journey from the head (idea) to the heart (life). Our Charism is not a philosophy; it is about a person (Jesus Crucified). We need a revitalisation in our Charism, intensifying our relationship with the Crucified One, which will make our witness more credible. We cannot proclaim the Passion to others if it has not penetrated our own lives.

Looking at our own personal experience, we know that the origin of every vocation is mysterious; it is God who calls. In our own vocation story, there was often the example and witness of a Passionist; their contemplation of the Passion of Jesus marked them out and drew us to them. When we joined the community, we deepened our love for this way of life and increased our commitment to the *Memoria Passionis*.

We are beginning to rediscover the Constitutions, their beauty and richness; we can profit from reading them in a prayerful way. In the Constitutions, we find a beauty and power of expression in relation to our Charism. Values that are specifically Passionist are found there, and it is important that we continue to meditate on the Constitutions in order to understand and live these values. Values which enable us to continue to live the Charism include prayer, solitude, penance, and poverty. In fact, they help us not only to live the Charism but also to be recognised within the Church as Passionists.

Young people today seek clear visible signs of identity within religious life. While we are called to internalise our Charism at a deeper level than just the external, we need also to find appropriate external expressions. Schools of prayer are an important way of communicating the Charism, especially to young people.

2) The Mission of the Passionists in the Contemporary World

God's Love for the World

“God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son.” We find proof of God's love for the world in the Passion of Jesus. We need to love our world as God loves it: with mercy and compassion. We seek to live compassion and mercy in community life, in our apostolate (new and old forms), in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Our attitude to the world is inspired by Mary at the foot of the Cross; we adopt an attitude of presence and contemplation of the “crucified” of today, where being precedes doing, where we practice listening, openness, attentiveness as we respond to the challenge they offer us.

The Passion of Jesus Continues

Blaise Pascal has said: “Christ is in agony until the end of time” (General's Report). The *Memoria Passionis* is the light in which we discern our ministries. The Passion of Jesus continues in the passion of the “crucified” and the passion of the earth (three concentric circles). The passion of the earth is both the cause and the fruit of human injustice.

Apostolate of Communion and Community Life

At the heart of our mission is the proclamation of the Gospel of the Passion by our life and apostolate (Const. 5). We intend to give first place to evangelization and re-evangelization, proclaiming Jesus and making him known.

Our ministry flows from communion, from our way of being community. There are many forms of apostolate, but if they do not flow from our fraternal communion, which is the basis of all our projects, then restructuring will be difficult. Fraternal trust is necessary for good planning. Our model is Mary, the Mother of Jesus, with her contemplative spirit. Fifty days after the Crucifixion and Resurrection, she played an important role in structuring the Church; she reminds us that ways of relating are more important than structures.

The world wishes to see and touch, not just to hear about, the love and compassion of

God; it wishes to see this love made visible in our communities. We can have structures in our life which block God's mercy. What we proclaim is a person, Jesus, and our experience of him; the structures of our community life, therefore, are to be shaped by our communion with God and our fraternal sharing in the Spirit.

In all our apostolates, we are conscious of the prophetic dimension of religious life. As religious, we have our own way of collaborating within the Church: a prophetic collaboration on the frontier, the edges of society, where no one wants to be.

Forms of Apostolate

There is a strong desire to renew our traditional apostolate (retreats, parish missions, spiritual accompaniment) and at the same time to seek new ways of responding to the new needs of the world. Our Passionist Charism has a response to today's questions, such as the loss of meaning in life (for those who live without faith and without hope), the need for justice, for a compassionate presence to those who suffer, for help for the marginalised. Working with the laity can help us to find new directions in our apostolate.

Parishes have a positive value. Parish ministry today is very different from in the past, as it must be based on collaboration. In keeping with our Charism, we have a preference for those parishes where community life is possible and where we can minister to the poor and suffering. The parish gives us opportunities to collaborate with the local church, with the laity, with young people. However, when we have too many parishes, it can stifle other initiatives.

We encourage ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue, especially with Islam on our common reverence for the mercy and compassion of God.

Today's world looks for people who are capable and trained. This is relevant to how we prepare and present ourselves for our mission. Although our starting point always remains the Passion of Christ, it is not enough for us to keep repeating the same things.

Our Presence in the World of Culture

"Culture has been an important vehicle for Christianity, for religious Orders and Congregations for transmitting the message of the Gospel and the values of human history" (Report of the Superior General).

We recognize the work of many Passionists in the world of culture, not only in the fields of theology and other ecclesiastical sciences, but also in philosophy and art (literature, painting, sculpture and music), either in dialogue with artists or as artists themselves. An awareness of the place of the Passion of Christ in culture and the arts enriches our understanding of this Mystery. In this context, we encourage collaboration with scholars and artists.

The Chapter saw our presence in the world of culture, the arts and the sciences as one of the areas of priority in the process of restructuring. Here we can promote awareness of existing initiatives in this area in which Passionists are engaged and propose how we can continue to engage our culture and cultures in relation to our mission. In this area

we can collaborate with other institutes or ecclesial movements which are concerned about questions of human suffering.

3) Restructuring

The Meaning of Restructuring

A process of reflection, new visions and practical collaboration that involves the whole of the Congregation at once; it aims to provide the best possible viable structures to ensure long term conditions for vitality in the life and mission of the Congregation within our new global and cultural situation. This new way of reflecting and meeting together leads to new ways of acting together. Eventually this can lead to new juridical and geographical entities. (Synod 2004)

The 2004 Synod's definition gives three stages of restructuring: 1) a new way of reflecting and meeting together; 2) new ways of acting together; 3) new juridical and geographical entities. The definition shows that if new juridical and geographical structures are developed, they should be the outcome of more sustained encounters with one another and of finding new ways of collaboration in life and mission.

A New Meaning for Maturity

Restructuring means abandon the classic notion of a process of maturation which sees the movement from vicariate to vice-province to province in terms of a growing independence and juridic, pastoral and financial autonomy; in the context of restructuring, maturity is measured by the capacity for communion, breaking down of frontiers, and generosity towards a common mission. Maturing means creating an international way of approaching our mission as Passionists. It becomes a question of our capacity for solidarity and generosity, journeying towards our mission in fidelity to our Charism.

Formation and Restructuring

Another area of priority agreed by the Chapter was formation. Our young religious need to be listened to. At provincial, regional and international level, we need to listen to them. We need structures which let them encounter each other and encounter the rest of us. We wish to reaffirm the importance of the "preferential option for youth". Throughout the Congregation, preferential attention should be given to formation. The Chapter also affirmed the importance of formation for those who will be engaged as formators, especially formation in our Charism and spirituality.

In the earliest years after initial formation, there is a need for "mentoring", for a way of assisting people in their first steps after leaving the formation community. We need to rediscover community as family. The Constitutions give us the fundamental points on community. It is enriching when young and old can live together; the old can be a great example to the young, who can learn a lot from them, just as the young give new hope to the old.

The Superior General has written to the whole Congregation about an international meeting of young Passionists in Sydney in 2008, in the context of the World Youth Day. This is an opportunity for formation and encounter for our young religious.

A Process of Conversion

We recognise that there are real fears and resistances regarding Restructuring. There is fear of loss of identity, autonomy, control of finances, power. In the process of restructuring, the personal dimension of conversion, spirituality and commitment should not be forgotten. The process of conversion and re-examination is an ongoing one for us; what is new here is that it will lead to new entities. The goal is a new vitality for our life and mission. The efficacy of new structures will depend on leadership. Conversion (to restructuring) has not happened yet in us or in our communities. In the 1988 Chapter, a key word was “passage” (with the sense of “passover”) – we need to do this without fear of dying. Restructuring includes personal, community and institutional conversion.

APPROVED PROPOSALS

1. The Lay Brothers

A) The Provinces, Vice-Provinces and Vicariates shall offer the same educational opportunities for human and spiritual enrichment to the Lay Brothers as for every other member of the Congregation.

B) The Chapter reconfirms the decision of the General Chapters of 1988, 1994 and 2000 – i.e. that the Congregation is no longer considered a clerical community; rather it is a fraternal Congregation of brothers and it invites the Superior General and his Council to present this matter to the competent dicasteries of the Holy See.

2. The History of the Provinces

During the next six years the Provincials and their Councils shall promote documentary research and the drafting of a history of each province.

3. Workshop for the Formation Personnel of the Congregation

It is recommended that the Superior General and his Council establish a “workshop” for the formation personnel of the Congregation dealing with the essential elements of Passionist life. It shall take place at least once every two years.

4. Workshop for Major Superiors

It is recommended to the Superior General and to his Council that a “workshop” be instituted for the major Superiors of the Congregation concerning the art of governing. It shall take place at least every two years. These “workshops” can be directed by individuals in the Congregation who have had experience in leadership. The workshop could be scheduled before or after the General Synods.

5. Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation

The Chapter decrees that an Office for Solidarity and Mission be constituted. In order to carry out this decree, in the context of Restructuring, the General Chapter approves the following recommendations:

The Office will be staffed full time by the Promotor of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (GPIC), who will also carry out the responsibilities of the Secretary General of the Missions as prescribed by the Constitutions, No.129 and by the General Regulations, No. 91. He will also be responsible for the promoting and the formation of the Congregation in the area of GPIC.

In the area of encouragement, promotion and formation, the Office for Solidarity and Mission shall have the following responsibilities:

-- To educate and form us and those who collaborate with us in ministry, concerning the way of thinking and acting in the area of solidarity. For this end, the office will always be in contact with the entire Congregation, facilitating an exchange of information and dialog, utilizing the modern means of technology at its disposition.

-- To provide materials for on-going formation renewal programs and courses in the area of GPIC.

-- To promote effective dialogue throughout the Congregation concerning current initiatives in this area.

Furthermore, the Office for Solidarity and Mission will concretely promote GPIC as follows:

-- It will undertake activities that promote GPIC on behalf of the Congregation and it will assist and encourage those religious who work in the various part of the Congregation to do the same, individually or in a group.

-- It will support the Passionist presence at the U.N.

-- It will cooperate with those who are willing to fight for justice, especially together with other congregations that are affiliated with the USG/UISG.

-- It will support the members and the areas of the Congregation in the call to solidarity by means of activities such as:

- Monitoring the current needs of the Congregation and of our foreign missions.
- Prepare and publish theological, cultural and sociological materials that can assist in understanding inculturation, the impact of globalization, etc.

The Office for Solidarity and Mission will provide for the material needs of our Congregation and individuals:

-- A Director of Development will be named. This person will possess a specialized understanding of organizations for international assistance and of their procedures and financial criteria. He will be responsible for researching and accessing sources of financing for the different activities of the Congregation.

-- The Director of Development will serve as the Secretary for requests for assistance that made to the Solidarity Fund.

6. Initial Passionist Formation

During the next six years, the Superior General, together with his Council, will delegate to persons who are competent in this area the task of composing a Passiological manual-compendium for the purpose of focusing and directing the vitality and the significance of our Passionist charism, by means of systematic, historical-theological study and the actualization of the charism itself.

7. The canonization of Theodore Foley

The 45th General Chapter approves the continuation of the cause for the beatification and canonization of Father Theodore Foley, C.P., former Superior General.

8. The Passionist Presence in the Holy Land – Bethany

The Superior General and his Council shall study the most effective way in which our house and community in Bethany may be a presence in the Holy Land that is

available for guests and for formation, especially the Passiological and Biblical formation of our religious and for the laity. Additionally, it shall have as its primary objective that of reconciliation and peace as a common project with the Passionist Family and also in conjunction with our presence at the UN and with our university and cultural institutions. The bellicose situation between Israel and Palestine engages the Passionist charism. The initial steps in this project may be that of involvement and collaboration with Catholic and non-Catholic institutions that work toward reconciliation, justice and peace.

9. Finances

The 45th General Chapter decrees that for the years 2007-2008 the pro rata for each Province and Vice-Province will be increased by 20%.

The 45th General Chapter is totally in agreement concerning the creation of a stronger financial base for the General Administration of the Congregation. Every Province and Vice-Province will study the proposals of the General Econome in his report to the Chapter. They will give their suggestions to the General Council within six months.

10. Participation at the General Chapter

The XII General Synod that was celebrated in Rome at the end of November, 2004, approved a regulation that modified the participation at General Chapters and at Synods. Consequently, according to that is prescribed by the Constitutions at No. 114, the General Chapter approved what was planned by the Synod: to make this definitive, this regulation must also be approved by the next General Chapter.

Approved regulations:

Those Provinces with at least 50 religious shall have one delegate; Provinces with more than one hundred religious may elect an additional delegate for every one hundred religious and for every unit greater than one hundred; Regional Vicars of vicariates with at least 25 religious are members by right of the General Chapter.

Those Provinces with less than 50 religious, those Vice-provinces and Vicariates shall elect one delegate from within the parameters of the regional Conference for every 50 religious and for every unit greater than 50.

For the election of delegates to the Chapter, those religious that form part of Regional Vicariates shall not be counted with their respective mother Province, but within the context of the regional Vicariates.

Those religious of the communities of Latin America that are directly dependent upon Spain, the religious of Mozambique that depend totally upon Brazil, and the religious of Angola who depend directly on Portugal shall be counted within the Regional Conferences (together with the Vicariates), and not within the Mother Province.

Every Conference shall devise appropriate norms for the election of its Delegates to the General Chapter.

Every Regional Conference shall have one Brother as its delegate to the General Chapter.

For determining the number of delegates those religious who do not have active and passive voice (GR 68, 73, 77, 99a, 99d) shall not be counted.

11. The Erection of the “Queen of Peace” Province of Indonesia

The 45th General Chapter, on the feast of St. Paul of the Cross, 19 October 2006, according to the norm stated in No. 104 of the Constitutions elevates the Queen of Peace Vice-Province of Indonesia to the status of Province with the same name.

Concurrently it confirms the following religious until the end of their present mandate: Fr. Sabinus Lohin in the office of Provincial Superior and Frs. Gabriele Antonelli, Pius Barces, Stephanus Lengi and Krisantus Krisantus in their respective offices of Provincial Consultors.