



CONGREGAZIONE DELLA PASSIONE DI GESÙ CRISTO

P.ZA SS.GIOVANNI E PAOLO, 13

00184 ROMA - ITALIA

TEL: (39)-06.77.27.11 – FAX: (39)-06.700.8454

*Il Superiore Generale*

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## **Letter subsequent to the 2008 General Synod of the Congregation** (Cuernavaca, Mexico, 6-17 September)

### **GREETING**

My dear brothers of the Congregation and sisters and brothers of the Passionist Family,

*“Were not our hearts burning (within us) while he spoke to us on the way...’  
So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered  
together the eleven and those with them...Then the two recounted what had  
taken place on the way and how he was made known to them...” (cfr. Lk.  
24:32-35)*

It is in this context of the experience of the disciples of Emmaus that I would like to recount and explain what took place during the General Synod of the Congregation that was celebrated in our retreat house of Cuernavaca, Mexico, from 6 to 17 September 2008, and dealt with the topic of Restructuring.

The two surprises that the disciples of Emmaus experienced – that of not having recognized Jesus as he spoke to them along the road and the surprise of then recognizing him in the breaking of the bread – were similar to what was revealed to us during the Synod.

I want to recount for you, my brothers and sisters of the Congregation and of the Passionist Family that are gathered in the Cenacle of the world, even if we live and work in 58 countries, like “the eleven and those with them”, something about the feelings, the bewilderment, the doubts, the process of discernment and the recognition of the presence of the Lord in our midst. Yes, there were some anxious moments; however, we experienced something similar to what occurred in the continuation of the Luke’s account:

*“Jesus stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’... But they were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. Then he said to them, ‘Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts?’” (Lk. 24:36-38)*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The days that we spent during the Synod in Cuernavaca, from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> of September 2008, were marked by a spirit of fraternity and prayer. The communal celebration of the Eucharist and the liturgies were characterized by cultural expressions that reflected the various continents and countries in which we live. The aim of the Synod was to discern together how new life and energy could be generated for the mission of the Congregation in light of the Chapter Mandate. We wanted to discover what kind of Restructuring is needed in order to revitalize the Congregation as whole, as single entities and as a family that is united by the same vocation and charism. We knew from the very beginning that it would be one of the most important and historical meetings of the Congregation.

“Restructuring: a prophecy and a necessity” – was the title of the introductory talk of **Fr. Octavio Mondragón, CP (REG)**. He reminded us that “the Restructuring of the Congregation radically belongs to another category greater than Christian life, that we normally call eschatological ten-

sion... the action of the Spirit in Christian communities of followers of Jesus and in the context of all peoples and religions, consists in irreversibly remaining on the road of the Resurrection, the fullness of life. Consequently, the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of Life. By the action of the Holy Spirit in the resurrection of Jesus the new creation has begun, the new birth of all the living... The experience of the Spirit or the practice of prophecy, or discernment... are vital necessities in the dynamism of the new creation. There is a theological formulation that expresses this vital need in the Church: 'Ecclesia semper reformanda.' We can apply it by analogy to the Congregation and the life of our communities and institutions by affirming this vital need: the life of the Congregation consists of an on-going dynamism, in and by the Spirit; that consists of assuming and expressing new forms of existence in light of the changes and challenges of common history." However Fr. Octavio reminded us "there is no possibility for any kind of Restructuring, remodeling or re-founding of our religious life without a particular experience of compassion, i.e. without complete willingness to assume in the midst of the Congregation the recreating act of the Spirit... Restructuring is saying to ourselves and allowing us to speak to others constitutive truths that purify our lives of all deceit or false illusions. It is a process of historical and theological sincerity because there is no way of being the Memory of the living God unless it begins from that Compassion in which He reveals himself as present and active...

The Memoria Passionis is the source of our Christian prophecy and, as such, is also the prophecy that structures Passionist life before and in the midst of the world. Clearly, Passionist life, from the perspective of prophecy, is challenged by two dynamics: The Memoria Passionis and the challenge of the present reality. A reform of the Congregation that doesn't look beyond its limits with the goal of confronting the world is not worthy of its name... (Because) the subject of the Cross is a unique declaration; it is a creative event because it creates a new horizon, a new way of being in the world."

**Fr. Donald Senior, CP (CRUC)** in his retreat conferences invited us as Passionists to reflect on St. Paul the Apostle on the occasion of the 2000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth, and to view the challenge of Restructuring in the light of his life and his theology. "Both personally and in the wider social and religious world of his day, Paul witnessed an old world die and a new one born... I think we Passionists who are also struggling with profound change and, for you as leaders of the Congregation with the challenging of bringing the Passionist communities around the world to consider change, can well turn to the example of Paul as an example and inspiration for the work ahead. Perhaps more than any other figure in the early Church Paul embodied profound conversion and transformation for the sake of the gospel—both on a personal level and within the religious tradition to which he was passionately committed... There is something else we can learn from our brother Paul as we reflect on our own lives and the life of our community as whole. Paul channeled all of his life force into the fulfillment of his God given mission. As Passionists we need to note in particular that the very heart of Paul's theology and his spirituality was his contemplation of the passion of Jesus. For Paul the dying and rising of Jesus Christ was the reality that explained all reality, which revealed the true face of God... From this center Paul would contemplate everything. For him, the heart of Christian life was love, as it was the unconditional love that animated the Crucified Christ. The experience of limitation and weakness, as Paul himself experienced in his own mortal body, would find meaning in the crucified body of Jesus who gave himself for us... Paul of Tarsus whose life was seized by the memory of the passion is truly our brother as Passionists (and we can from him something about apostolic leadership): Jesus, God's Suffering Servant who gave his life that others might live, was the ultimate sign of how authentic authority was exercised. However, although Paul lived at a time when his vision of the Church was not yet finally defined, he never let go of his foundational experience of faith: 'Can anything separate us from the love of God?'

Paul, on the other hand, transmitted to that church a relentless spirit of mission and a passion for bold ideas, the apostle of dramatic change and God's new possibilities...

As we as a Passionist community contemplate great change, the restructuring of our vision and our way of life, as we strive to hand on to a new generation of Passionists the living heritage of our great and fragile religious community, in a time tinged with apocalyptic hues, we might do well

to remember Paul: passionate disciple of the Crucified Jesus and theologian of experience; confident in his apostolic call and identity but non-possessive and holding that treasure with others; a man whose restless, bold dreams brought him suffering but whose hope, rooted in faith, never dimmed.”

This is truly an incredible time, an auspicious time for anyone who seeks to live life profoundly, as did Paul, rooted in his own time and culture. The Restructuring of the Congregation is rooted in the hope of discovering this kind of immersion experience for renewed vitality.

## **EVENT AND MEMORY**

The various events and days of the Synod were lived in an ambience of collaboration and mutual respect both in small work groups and in sessions of the general assembly. In my Report to the Synod I stated: “Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid!”(Mt. 14:27) Among other points, I invited those present to live the Synod as a time of grace and not just another organizational meeting. I briefly summarized the work that took place prior to the Synod itself and the steps that have already been taken in the process of Restructuring. That is, from the initial planting of the seed in the General Chapter of 2000 to the actual initiation of the process during the Synod of 2004 at which time it was recognized as a call from God to conversion to a new creative fidelity for community life, mission and solidarity within the Congregation and as an option for the poor.

The Congregation was placed in a state of dialog and discernment using three key words: Charism, Presence and Mission which were understood in a prophetic and creative context.

The General Chapter of 2006 by means of the Principal Decree which is the heart and the key to the Chapter itself, urged us to dedicate ourselves to the process of Restructuring “enthusiastically” – in other words, to be alive and active. The General Chapter acknowledged and confirmed through discernment that the process of Restructuring was a call from God to a new way of “reflecting”, of “interacting with each other” and to accept the possibility of “creating” new structures that are at the service of the charism. Furthermore, in order to make the process of Restructuring more effective and to assist it to move forward, the Chapter chose seven Coordinators, one for each of the Regional Conferences of the Congregation. One of the specific fruits of the collaboration and dialog between the General Council and the Coordinators was that of preparing a questionnaire for collecting information which was called a “Template” for the planning process. The goal of this instrument was to study the reality of the Congregation today: with regard to its composition, strengths and weaknesses, apostolate, presence in a particular area, financial status and perspectives for the future.

I want to stress how well the territorial entities – Provinces, Vice-Provinces and Vicariates working individually and within their Conferences – completed this great task with the assistance of the Coordinators and in dialog with the General Council. Everyone returned the template for planning, completed with the requested information. From reading and analyzing the responses to the templates it was possible to understand the Congregation’s needs and the direction it has to go in order to move beyond its limits and wants and so be able to grow and share the present positive aspects. Therefore it was necessary to “explore”, “analyze” and “clarify” the reality of the Congregation that emerged from the Template responses in order to better understand its current reality vis a vis the process of Restructuring.

For the purpose of studying and analyzing this material, we sought the assistance of the “Craighead Institute”, specifically Sister Christine Anderson, FCJ and Dr. Jim Urquhart. Sister Christine also served as moderator for the Synod in Mexico. With her vast experience and professional expertise she helped us move from an analysis of the responses to the templates, to consideration of various options, and eventually to the decisions that were made.

## **CRITERIA**

The conclusions and the decisions of the Synod were also the result of the Criteria that were developed in a preceding meeting of the General Council and the seven Coordinators. Following a period of dialog and discernment these criteria were accepted by the Synod and they enabled us to

choose new structures that better express our Charism, our Presence and our Mission for the world of today and tomorrow. The following criteria were often stressed: our international nature; the exchange of life among the older parts and the younger parts of the Congregation; attention to the elderly religious; and the option for the poor.

## **SOLIDARITY**

The decision to create new structures derived from the need to respond the new challenges that the Congregation is facing and which were revealed in the analysis of the Template responses that was presented by Sr. Christine. The key word for this discernment was “Solidarity”. Solidarity will be operative in the three areas that were designated as priorities for new vitality in the Congregation: Solidarity in the area of Formation, Solidarity in the area of Personnel, and Solidarity in the area of Finances. We can no longer consider these three areas of solidarity as merely voluntary choices for “ad hoc” generosity or the occasional decision of a Chapter or a Provincial Council. Indeed, after discernment, we thought to give them a structural form. There is no doubt that in order for these new models of Solidarity to work, they need to be studied and tried. There was, however, a new awareness that the various parts of the Congregation are responsible for each other.

## **NEW CONFIGURATION**

Structural changes were also necessary in the form of Territorial Configurations. The six territorial configurations that emerged during the Synod’s discernment process and were approved are as follows:

1—The Configuration of Jesus Crucified is composed of the Presentation Province (PRAES), in Italy and its Vicariate of Bahia in Brazil (PRAES-DOMIN); the Addolorata Province (DOL) in Italy and its Vicariate of Espiritu Santo and Minas Gerais in Brazil (DOL-VICT); the Province of St. Paul of the Cross (PAUL) in the USA, Canada and Jamaica; the Holy Cross Province (CRUC) in the USA; the Calvary Province (CALV) in Brazil and its mission in Mozambique; the Province of the Immaculate Conception (CONC) in Argentina and Uruguay; the Province of Christ the King (REG) in Mexico; the Province of our Lady of Fatima (FAT) in Portugal, with its mission in Angola; and the Vicariates of Puerto Rico (CORI-PAC) and Goiás in Brazil (SPE-LIBER). As of December 31, 2007, this new Configuration was composed of 625 religious, of whom 585 had Perpetual Vows, 34 had Temporary Vows and there were 6 novices.

2— The Configuration of the Sacred Heart, is composed of the FID Vice-Province in Colombia; the three Spanish Provinces: CORI, FAM and SANG and their missions in Latin America; the Dominican Republic (CORI-PAC); Peru (CORI-RES); Venezuela, Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador and Cuba (FAM); Panama and Ecuador (SANG); Chile (SANG-CARM); and Bolivia (SANG-EXAL). As of 31 December 2007 the new Configuration had 446 religious, of whom 377 had Perpetual Vows, 54 had Temporary Vows and there were 15 novices.

3—The Configuration of Eugene Bossilkov is composed of the Italian provinces of PIET, and its mission in Bulgaria, CORM, LAT and CFIXI; the ASSUM Province (Poland, Ukraine, the Czech Republic); the MICH Province of France, and the VULN Vice-Province (Germany and Austria). As of 31 December 2007 there were 424 religious in this area, of whom 388 had Perpetual Vows, 33 had Temporary Vows and there were 3 novices.

4—The PASPAC Configuration comprises the SPIR Province (Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea); the MACOR Province (Korea) and the mission in China; the PASS Province (the Philippines); the MAIAP Vice-Province (Japan); the THOM Vicariate (India); and the Mission in Vietnam. As of 31 December 2007 there were 369 religious in this new Configuration, of whom 281 had Perpetual Vows, 73 had Temporary Vows and there were 15 novices.

5—The Passionist Configuration of Africa is composed of the SALV Vice-Province of Congo; the Kenya Vicariate (CORM-CARLW); the Vicariate of Tanzania (CORM-GEMM); and the Vicariate of Botswana and South Africa (PATR-MATAF). As of 31 December 2007 this new Con-

figuration had 141 religious, of which 109 had Perpetual Vows, 29 had Temporary Vows and there were 3 novices.

6—The Passionist Configuration of North Europe includes these Provinces: GABR in Belgium, IOS in England, PATR in Ireland and SPE in Holland and Germany. As of 31 December 2007 this new Configuration had 174 religious, of whom 174 had Perpetual Vows.

N.B.

As of the moment, there has been no decision concerning the designation of the Vicariate of Blessed Isidore (LAT-ISID) in Brazil (6 religious) and the IOS mission in Sweden (3 religious).

## **EXPERIMENTATION**

The Synod approved the new Configurations as part of the process of Restructuring of the Congregation. These are experimental and, in dialog with the General Council, their “viability” will be ascertained until the next General Synod of 2010. In dialog with the Configurations themselves, we will evaluate if any of them, due to the large areas that they encompass, while remaining a single Configuration, could be divided into two zones in order to make matters more manageable. The Coordinators, named by the new Configurations, will continue with their work of coordination within each new Configuration and serving as contact persons with the General Council for the process of Restructuring. Each Configuration will have at least one General Consultor as a reference person.

Furthermore, the Synod decided to suspend the seven Regional Conferences into which the Congregation was divided (Regulations Nos. 94, 95, 96) until the General Chapter of 2012; whereas the Provinces, Vice-Provinces and Vicariates will continue as usual until the next General Chapter. Each territorial entity will test the viability of the Configuration to which they belong. They can also collaborate among themselves to continue the positive projects already in progress or begin new ones.

## **EVALUATION**

The guide lines and the directives that will guide this experimental time period are, among others, those that were approved for the three areas of Solidarity: 1) Structures for solidarity in formation; 2) Structures for solidarity in personnel; 3) Structures for solidarity in finances. The evaluation of these decisions, the difficulties that were encountered and the accomplishments achieved will be shared at the next Synod of 2010 where, by means of appropriate discernment, we will see if modifications or corrective measures are needed for this program in process.

Therefore, in accord with what Jesus said: “*New wine in new wineskins*” (Mk.2:22), during the next two years we will continue to work on this change of mentality, and spiritually to assume a more profound attitude of conversion which will help us to bring about “*a new way of being together as Passionists in the mission for the life of the world*” and make us “*grow in awareness that life is a gift to be shared.*” (2000 General Chapter Document, 4.6)

We are called to take a qualitative leap of seeing and living our Passionist life, more on a Congregational level than on a Provincial level, moving beyond our own cultural and geographic boundaries and rediscovering the evangelical creativity of the early Church that was able to scale the walls of Jerusalem and go beyond the confines of the Israelite people as the only ones destined for their mission.

St. Paul the Apostle is a good example of going “beyond” geographical and cultural confines when he came to understand that Jesus was inviting all of us to be part of the mission: “*Go and teach all nations.*” (Mt. 28:19) – a mission that was multi-cultural and multi-ethnic. The Congregation should live out its international dimension by being capable of dialog with all its parts and live out its missionary dimension by an exchange of gifts between different countries and cultures. Today the process of Restructuring is calling us to this kind of conversion by inviting us to live solidarity in its widest sense and in a spirit of new birth and relationship.

## **TIMETABLE**

The program for determining the “feasibility” of the new Configurations will not end at the Synod of 2010 even if it will be an important phase for the Congregation. In fact, at that time we will confirm or modify the process by addressing possible problems that may arise from the experimentation process and we will also study a model of Government for the new Configurations and the General Government, still recognizing the Synod as a transitional step. The final two years of the process, 2010-2012, will bring us to the General Chapter where we anticipate that the new Configurations will be further defined with the possibility of new juridical entities being created within them. The model of government that will be used for the entities and the General Council will also be approved.

This is the timetable that has been planned for the next four years. Each of us is responsible and is called to collaborate with this process according to our abilities and with our prayers. We are called to live out this time of grace and life with enthusiasm and involvement. May Jesus walk with us on the road to the Emmaus of Restructuring of the Congregation, and open our minds and hearts so that we will understand and to do the will of the Father in regard to the renewal of the life of the Congregation, and so fulfill our one mission.

## **WORDS OF GRATITUDE AND CONCLUSION**

I wish to sincerely thank the Province of Christ the King (REG) of Mexico who welcomed us and who, together with all of its religious, was available to serve our needs -- especially its Provincial Superior, Fr. Francisco Valadéz, CP, his Council, the Passionist Family and all those who helped with the preparations of the Synod that was very successful and also for the comfortable setting in which it took place. I hope I am not overlooking anyone! God bless all of you!

The Acts of the Synod will express additional greetings and offer more specific and extensive words of gratitude.

I also wish to acknowledge and thank the General Consultors for their work for the Synod and for their effective help in the ministry of responsibility for the Congregation and for the suggestions that they offered during the preparation of this document.

Let us place this Synod and all that has already taken place and all that will transpire and develop from it under the protection of Mary who we venerated in Mexico, including a concelebrated Mass at her Shrine, Our Lady of Guadalupe, affectionately referred to as “La Morenita”. May she grant us simplicity of heart and the courage to act on the decisions that were made.

Before concluding I want to remind you that next year 2009, we will mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the approbation of our Constitutions that occurred on 2 March 1984, the feast of the Solemn Commemoration of the Passion. Therefore the year 2009 can be an opportunity for we religious to “re-read” the Constitutions in our communities and with the Passionist Family and to organize study days, seminars and symposia to grow in appreciation for its content that is characterized by prophetic insight into our charism and genuine human and religious understanding.

May St. Paul of the Cross, our Father, whose feast we are about to celebrate, bless us and guide us.

Rome – Retreat of Sts. John and Paul  
10 October 2008

Fr. Ottaviano D’Egidio, CP  
Superior General

First day of the Novena to St. Paul of the Cross