

# **Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ**

**The XIII General Synod of the Congregation  
Cuernavaca, Mexico  
06-17 September 2008**

## **REPORT OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL**

***“TAKE COURAGE, IT IS I, DO NOT BE AFRAID!”***

**(Mt. 14:27)**



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**to the XIII General Synod of the Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ**  
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**“TAKE COURAGE, IT IS I, DO NOT BE AFRAID!”(Mt. 14:27)**

**Dear brothers and sisters of the Congregation and the Passionist Family,**

It is amazing how God is present in our life and guides our steps even with signs which, at first glance, don't seem to be anything out of the ordinary. The liturgy of this past August 10, XIX Sunday of Ordinary Time, the Sunday that preceded the last Consulta of the General Council which took place in Rome on Monday and Tuesday, 11-12 August, in preparation for the present General Synod, at which Sister Christine Anderson participated, offered us the Gospel pericope from Matthew dealing with the storm on the Lake of Gennesaret (Mt. 14:22-33) and the episode of Elijah on Mount Horeb, as if to give us the keynote and reference point for the Synod. The same elements that are present in Matthew are also reported in the Gospel of Mark (Mk. 6:45-53).

After having fed the crowd by means of the multiplication of the loaves, Jesus wanted to personally dismiss them and “*at once he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side.*” Both Matthew and Mark use the word “*made*”— Jesus orders them, not merely invites them. It is a call to obedience that has two dimensions and two objectives: to get into the boat together and to go to the other side of the lake. We too, in the Congregation, have understood the process of Restructuring as an obedient response to the call of God in order to give renewed vitality to our life and mission and together we have boarded the boat to arrive at “*the other side.*” I am reminded of how St. Paul of the Cross compared the Congregation to a small boat in the midst of the ocean, amid the challenges of the world and history to be lived: “*The boat is in the sea without sails and without oars... The storms roused against this tiny boat are great and fearful, but the Divine Pilot is steering so that there be no shipwreck.* (Letter to Tommaso Fossi, December 3, 1742, II, 170). We, like St. Paul of the Cross and the disciples in the gospel event, can find ourselves at night and in the midst of the sea, when the wind can come up and the waves beat against the boat. We are tired and afraid; but Jesus arrives, he who is not a ghost or an illusion, but truly him, in faith. He will walk on the waters of our fear and trembling and he will assure us: “***Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.***”

It is with these same words of encouragement that Jesus invites us to live this present Synod, certain of his reassuring presence in the boat with us.

It is always a great joy to be together. And if in the thoughts of each us there is always present the part of the Congregation, Province, Vice-Province and Vicariate that the Providence of God has entrusted to our service of authority and of guidance, now that we are gathered together, our vision and attention should be directed to the entire Congregation and the common good, one in mind and heart.

Furthermore, I invite you to live the Synod not as a series of activities to be organized and completed, but as an opportunity of grace. It is the Lord who passes by and, like the prophet Elijah on Mt. Horeb in the first reading of the same Sunday, last August 10, we cover our heads

and faces with our mantle (1Kings 19:9; 11-13). God will not be in the strong wind, rending the mountains and crushing rocks, nor will he be in the earthquake or the fire; but in the tiny, whispering sound and he will speak to us with intimate and familiar words as he did with Elijah and, he will also call us by name: “*What are you doing here...?*” Each of us can respond as did Elijah: “*I have been most zealous for the LORD...*”, because it is for his sake that we are gathered for the Synod in Cuernavaca, our Mount Horeb. The Lord will respond to us: “*Go...go back by the same way...*” And Elijah departed from there.

We resume our journey, not to finish a program, but to live “the Synod event” with joy and with docility, trusting grace, in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Again, I extend a fraternal and cordial welcome to all of you here present who, with various titles and with various assignments, are participating in the Synod. I especially want to welcome those major Superiors who were recently elected to office and for the first time form part of the Synod assembly: you will enrich us with your originality and enthusiasm. I also greet all the religious of the Congregation who live and work in the communities throughout the 58 countries where we are present and together with them, I send my fraternal greetings to the women religious and the laity of the Passionist Family, especially the elderly and the sick. May God bless them!

We especially remember those religious and laity who have recently left us for eternal life: we remember them to the Lord so that they may be embraced by his mercy and the fullness of life.

## **TASKS**

During the course of this Synod assembly it will be our task to address questions and projects of vital importance to our Congregation in order to arrive at a point of making decisions that we deem to be opportune and necessary.

In the letter of convocation of the Synod we stated the tasks of the Synod itself and the objectives to be attained. Number 144 of the Constitutions state that: “*The General Synod... will examine the programmes proposed by the General Chapter and evaluate their implementation. Further, it will suggest initiatives to keep the Congregation continually up to date; it will propose means of settling problems in a spirit of brotherly harmony, and will call the attention of the various Provinces to their duties towards one another.*”

As usual an evaluation will be made of the progress that has been made in the Program established by the last General Chapter. There will be the presentation of the Budget report and the financial plan of the General Econome. Additionally, the Secretary General for Solidarity and Mission will make a report and there will also be other reports as specified in the Agenda.

However the central topic and the heart of the Synod will be a verification and deeper appreciation of the mandate of the last General Chapter that “*enthusiastically commits the Congregation to further the process of Restructuring begun in the General Synod of 2004 which will continue until at least the next General Chapter (of 2012).*” (Central Declaration of the 45<sup>th</sup> General Chapter)

## **BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE WORK ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED**

The seed of Restructuring was already present in the General Chapter of 2000 that was celebrated in Itaicì, Brazil that had as its theme: “*The Passion of Jesus Christ, the passion for*

life.” Among the points expressed in the Document, is one that highlights the necessity of a reorganization of the Congregation: “*The capitulars noted the need for an organizational renewal of structures in the Congregation.*” (CD2000, #4.7).

Through discernment and by recognizing the signs of the times, we are convinced more than ever what was affirmed by the General Chapter itself in another point of the Chapter Document: “*‘Solidarity’ is the word chosen to describe a new way of being together as Passionists in the mission for the life of the world. New realities call for new responses in faith....To live this vision of solidarity calls us to a profound conversion of mind and heart. We grow in awareness that life is a gift to be shared.*” (CD2000, 4.6)

“...A new way of being together”, and “new realities call for new responses”, and understanding that “*life is a gift to be shared*” not only on community or provincial levels, but also on a congregational level, being together involves juridical realities different from those that we now know.

The 2004 Synod acknowledged Restructuring as a call from God to conversion for a new creative fidelity to community life, to prayer, to mission and to concrete solidarity with the Congregation and toward the poor.

Restructuring is a means to give renewed vitality and greater efficacy to our life and mission. New ways of being together and discerning new responses to the changing conditions of the world and of the Congregation can be created. In fact, the world has changed significantly and so, too, our Congregation is very different from the past and we must work with these changing realities for the Kingdom of God.

Therefore, Restructuring is for revitalizing; Restructuring in order to permit a greater flow of life from one part of the Congregation to another, “*one in mind and one in spirit*” in order to afford everyone, without exceptions, the possibility of new life. It is in giving that we save ourselves; saving ourselves and refusing to be open to others gives us the illusion of self-preservation; we are deceived into thinking that we can continue to live, closing future horizons and life: “*Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.*” (Mk.8:35)

It is time that we think more as a Congregation than as a Province. It is time to go beyond specific geographical and cultural boundaries in order to rediscover an evangelical freshness and the capacity to dialog with all parts of the Congregation through an exchange of gifts among various cultures and nations. Where there is authentic and sincere communication, there will be true communion. It is necessary to enter into the “culture of the other” in order to understand his ideas, share his emotions, share his difficulties and his dreams. Jesus wants us to be multicultural and multiethnic: “*Go and teach all nations.*” (Mt.28:19)

The young religious of the Congregation have great hopes for this Synod. Without any great initiative they fear that the future will be more and more reductive and difficult. The youth, lacking any great prospective or dreams that impact upon community and apostolic life that is weak and listless and, at times, not present, quickly lose enthusiasm and soon leave the Congregation. These are concerns and painful wounds of various Provinces.

The process of Restructuring was begun by the work of a Commission composed of Fr. Nicholas Postlethwaite, Fr. Denis Travers and Fr. Adolfo Lippi, who we thank once again for having done an enlightened and efficient job. The Commission, together with the General Council, established three objectives: 1) Actively involve every religious in spiritual and institutional renewal to which God has called us; 2) Generate a planning process that would permit the Congregation to proceed in unity; 3) Reformulate our Passionist “vision” in the world

of today and tomorrow in order to effectively decide and carry out the changes to which we have been called.

Having undertaken the long road of Restructuring we are more and more convinced that for effective change and for our greater effectiveness personal and community conversion is necessary and this impelled us to go to the very roots of our being consecrated to the Passion of Jesus.

The Congregation has been placed in a context of dialogue and discernment with three key words: Charism, Presence and Mission, to be understood prophetically and creatively.

In light of the celebration of the then upcoming General Chapter of 2006, we asked ourselves how we should proceed along this road, what are the criteria for discernment and what are the guidelines for proceeding with the dialog within the Congregation itself and in the areas? What areas should be discussed more intensely among them in order to arrive, with the Chapter of 2012, at new configurations and membership? What are the fundamental and operative criteria?

The criteria should be used flexibly and realistically; at times they will be independent; at other times one may exclude the other in the choice of models for a new configuration of the Congregation or for the choice of the same areas of dialog. At the Chapter of 2006 two models (A and B) of possible new territorial entities were proposed.

## **THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF 2006**

At the last General Chapter of 2006 we reconsidered the questions that were posed in the past personally and in dialog in the communities: *“What kind of Restructuring is necessary in order to give new vitality to the mission of the Congregation?”*; *“What kind of formation, what kind of community life and mission and what kind of future do we envision for the Congregation of today and for the Congregation within ten, twenty years?”*

In light of these questions and others, the General Chapter that was celebrated in Rome during the month of October, 2006, examined the process in place and indicated by means of a Central Declaration and by the choice of the ten Priorities, the road to be taken during the upcoming years.

*The 45<sup>th</sup> General Chapter enthusiastically commits the Congregation to further the process of Restructuring that was begun at the General Synod of 2004 and which will continue at least until the next General Chapter of 2012. This commitment is made for the sake of the life and vitality of the Congregation and in order to respond more effectively to the Gospel mandate and to our Passionist vocation -- to proclaim the message of the Cross in today's world.*

*The Chapter endorses planning to restructure for two reasons: First, because we have discerned the call of God's Spirit from North to South and East to West, to deepen the Congregation's commitment to Memoria Passionis. Our fidelity to the Passionist charism is unleashed by the working of the Holy Spirit in the Church. It is in our lived experience of Church that we discover how we have responded to the movement of the Holy Spirit, what are our life-giving memories, and what are we leaving behind us, forgotten and dead.*

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

*In fidelity to the work of the Spirit, we are given a new way of reflecting in our lives; a new form of interaction among ourselves, and the possibility of recreating the structures and the institutions which are at the service of the charism.*

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

*Secondly, we recognize that the Spirit has already initiated the process of Restructuring in many areas of the Congregation where creative new ways of responding to the needs of today are already being put into place. The Chapter wishes to encourage and develop such initiatives throughout the Congregation. Some “structures” which previously served the life of the Congregation must change if they are to support Passionist development into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Chapter commits the Congregation to study and revise all of its priorities and needs, its strengths and its weaknesses. The Chapter believes this will help deepen Passionist identity and enable the emergence of a more effective international Religious Congregation for the Church of today and tomorrow.*

### **THE DECREE**

*The Chapter has discerned ten priorities to help guide our process of Restructuring at every level. The Chapter decrees that each Province, Vice-Province and Vicariate will develop a plan for its future life and mission.*

*Each Province, Vice-Province and Vicariate in producing its plan, can work alone or in cooperation with others, in its Region or beyond.*

*These plans will be shared regionally. They will also be shared with the whole Congregation to provide the basis for the next General Synod and for the next stage of Restructuring.*

*The General Government will be responsible for the on-going Restructuring process to enable provincial, inter-provincial and inter-regional coordination to proceed in as effective a way possible, particularly to insure all of the parts of the Congregation network with each other. The Chapter especially emphasizes the importance of ensuring creative dialog between the older parts of the Congregation with those that are younger.*

### **AREAS OF PRIORITY**

To enable these plans the Chapter singled out ten areas of priority to serve as reference points for enlightenment and guidance in formulating the plans themselves.

1. International Collaboration for Community Life and Mission; 2. Solidarity in the areas of personnel and finances; 3. A revision of the structures of government, communication and juridical entities; 4. Formation; 5. Commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation; 6. Collaboration with the Laity; 7. Dialog with the world of culture and the arts and sciences; 8. Communications; 9. Ecumenism and Inter-religious Dialogue; 10. Preferential Option for Youth.

### **SINCE THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF 2006**

Dear religious and brothers and sisters of the Passionist Family, we are living in an important moment in our own lives and the life of the Congregation. The Central Decree of the 45<sup>th</sup>

General Chapter, which is the heart and the key of the Chapter itself, urges us to continue “with enthusiasm” the process of Restructuring, therefore, to be alive and active. We recognize it and we confirm it, through discernment, as 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 “reflection”, of “interacting” among ourselves and of accepting the possibility of “recreating” the structures and the institutions that are at the service of the charism.

Conversion is here, in accepting these new endeavors, discussing with an open mind and heart our own certainties and habitual ways of thinking and living that are engrained in us over years of religious life and in our past.

In addition, to render the process of Restructuring, already in process, more efficacious, the Chapter opted for the choice of an internal Coordinator for each of the areas or regional conferences of the Congregation. The Coordinator was chosen and named by each conference itself; they have no juridical authority, but their task has been to animate the Provinces, Vice-provinces and vicariates and the regional Conference as a whole. Additionally, it has been their responsibility to be in contact with the General Council for the process of Restructuring in preparation for the present Synod and directed toward the verification that we will do. The regional Coordinators that the seven Conferences have chosen are: Frs. Eulogio Cordero Martinez (CII); Leone Masnata (CIPI); Norberto Donizetti (COPAL); Michael Ogweno Yogo (CPA); Joseph Joseph (IPCM); Nicholas Postlethwaite (NECP); Paul Gabriel Tae Won Pak and finally, Joaquim Rego (PASPAC).

The General Council met with all the coordinators together for the first time at Sts. John and Paul from 3-5 September 2007 and for the second time from 5-7 May 2008 at our retreat house of Las Presas, Santander (Spain) where we also had the opportunity to meet with the Iberian CII conference. The General Council has also had the possibility to meet with the PASPAC Conference from 16 to 21 September 2007 at our retreat house in Seoul, South Korea and with the CLAP Conference in Colombia in May, 2007. The General Consultors were present at assemblies and gatherings of the various provinces, conferences or areas. Those moments of specific dialog, verification of the process and study of the progress of the Congregation were the celebrations of the provincial chapters and congresses with the respective canonical visitations in preparation for the same. During the past two years 13 Chapters were celebrated (REPAC; CORM; PIET;PRAES; CFIXI; DOL; LAT; CRUC; SPIR; MICH; SPE; REG; PATR. ) and 2 Congresses (FID; VULN.)

There were also special anniversary celebrations. These were moments of joy that were shared among us and with the laity of the Passionist Family. They were also opportunities for reflection and deepening of the values of our life and mission. I recall the following celebrations: Seventy five years of Passionist presence in Congo (SALV) that was also celebrated with an assembly of the Vice-Province during the early part of May, 2007; fifty years of Passionist presence in the Philippines (PASS), celebrated at the end of February, 2008.

The first meeting of the General Council with the Coordinators at Sts. John and Paul, moderated by Fr. Robert Joerger (PAUL), was especially helpful in clarifying the responsibilities and the “mission” of the Coordinators in reference to the Provinces and the areas of belonging. They have the function of being animators of their specific Region with regard to Restructuring, enabling interaction among the various entities and communication with the General Council. This does not eliminate or limit their role and responsibilities as Major Superiors within their juridical entities. The role does not have a static quality; rather it will continue to evolve with the progress of the process of Restructuring.

The General Council, responsible for the process of Restructuring will ordinarily meet with the group of Coordinators once a year and/or when the Council deems it opportune.

Another important decision that was taken during the meeting in Rome was to prepare a Template-guide for the planning the process of Restructuring. The scope of this instrument was to allow us to read the realities of the Congregation today, in reference to composition, strong points and weak points, the apostolate, presence in a territory, the financial situation and the prospective for the future.

The study of the Template-guide and the responses have the scope of placing each entity, Province, Vice-Province and Vicariate in front of a mirror and look at itself in order to be aware of its own reality and of its own future and to discern the steps to be taken to improve the quality of its own life and mission. This is not only in regard to itself, but also going beyond its own confines and the immediate interests of the Province or Vicariate. In fact, the responses to the Template of all the entities permit us to view, in addition to our own, the realities of all the others, even the individual entities with their difficulties and riches, as well as together as a Congregation. This information will allow us to dialog and discern in order to arrive at making operative decisions. The knowledge of the areas of poverty/weaknesses and riches/strengths and the potentialities of the various territorial Entities (Province, Vice-province, Vicariates) and of the Congregation at large will allow for strategic projections and interventions so that, through sharing and within the optic of solidarity understood in the wide and evangelical sense, it will be beneficial to the individual parts as well as to the entire body of the Congregation.

I want to positively underline the great work done by the territorial Entities and the Conferences with the help of the Coordinators and in dialog with the General Council. All have returned the Template/guide for planning that was completed by the various parts, responding to the various questions and the projections. The reports that arrived at the general Secretariat numbered 40, composed of approximately 350 pages. Some regional Conferences, in addition to the responses to the Template/guide of the individual Entity, also sent responses as a Conference, already hypothesizing about possible developments for new territorial configurations with the unification of the Provinces, anticipating one of the tasks of the present Synod. What will emerge from the analysis of the responses to the Template can serve as a guide and light for planning.

In fact, the material that arrived and the information that it contained is being “read and studied” so that it will be meaningful and can be useful for the final steps to be taken. The same number of religious that were listed in the various age groups is significant and they offer information, as do the number religious houses that are present within a territory, whether as a group as well as individuals; the number and the quality of the apostolic commitments and the work in each community; the vocation situation and initial formation; the financial situation of the Provinces and the communities and whatever else was requested in the Template/guide, including the “vision” for the future and the projections of the entity itself; and the strategic plan hypothesized in light of the ten priorities indicated by the last General Chapter. The interpretation of the data that was received was outstanding; it required professionalism, understanding and experience of religious life.

For the reading and analysis of the data and for adequate collaboration during this phase of the Process of Restructuring, we have availed ourselves of the work of the “Craighead Institute”, and the persons of Sr. Christine Anderson, FCJ and Dr. Jim Urquhart. We met several times with them in Rome at Sts. John and Paul and they participated in the meeting last May

with the General Council, the Coordinators and the CII Conference. Sister Christine is also the Moderator of the present Synod.

The meeting at Las Presas was important because it gave us the opportunity to verify the progress made since the General Chapter and if we are proceeding according to what was programmed for the Synod in light of the analysis of the responses obtained from the planning Template/guide.

The two collaborators, Christine and James, communicated their analysis in reference to approximately half of the responses that were received by the general Secretariat, in anticipation of a complete analysis to be done on all the reports in preparation for and the celebration of the Synod.

The important and useful work of the Coordinators was highlighted, also it may be useful in light of the information, to examine and understand what has been done, the difficulties that were encountered and the results obtained, the possible strategies and how the process should ultimately proceed.

Of help in this task have been the meetings that the General Council has had with the various Conferences. The awareness of the experiences and the plans in the various cultural contexts will help us to think more as a Congregation and to maintain and reinforce an international mentality. The experience of working together facilitates the completion of the process itself in reference to our life and mission.

In the course of their discussion, the Coordinators reported that there were some questions and doubts concerning the internal matters of the Conferences: some spoke about the amalgamation of Provinces; others about clarifying the difference between Restructuring and reorganization. Restructuring is a form, a mode of being that involves the entire Congregation: reorganization is the consequence of Restructuring, how it operates in the various dimensions of life and mission; reorganization is part of Restructuring and is a result of the same. In order to do this work well it is necessary to clearly understand this difference.

From the reading and the analysis of the responses to the template/guide one can understand where the Congregation wants to go in order to move beyond deficits and limitations and to increase and share the positive dimensions that are present. James, one of the moderators of the meeting, offered us other insights drawn from the analysis of the responses to the Template. It is necessary to “explore”, “analyze” and “clarify” the reality of the Congregation that emerges from the responses in order to understand what is happening in regard to the process. These are some elements that are emerging: there is still too much focusing on our own Province; one of the main concerns is youth and vocation ministry; there is a desire to give greater attention and energy to initial and ongoing formation; there is a need to share financial goods seeking greater balance and equality in their distribution; improve communications; be aware of international dimensions; empower the vitality of the charism; care for community life and fraternal relationships; review and discern the distribution of presence within a territory; clarify and motivate the mission; overcome individualism on the part of various Entities in favor of greater cooperation; develop a spirituality for the elderly; bring an end to the process of secularization that is growing in the Congregation; the need to work more with the laity.

These are signs and desires that without a doubt favor the process of Restructuring.

## **CRITERIA FOR RESTRUCTURING**

Then the meeting at Las Presas continued by studying the Criteria that will permit us to single out the model of the Congregation that we want so that it will be more capable of expressing more adequately Charism, Presence and Mission for the world of today and tomorrow. The choice of the Model will tell us what changes the Congregation will also have to make on an institutional level.

In the area of methodology, we identified how as separate groups, the General Council and the Coordinators, the results can then be combined into a single text.

The proposed Criteria are examples and therefore can be amplified by the Synod, modified if appropriate, and other elements can freely be added to them.

### **The proposed Criteria:**

- 1- That the new structure serve the charism and the mission of the Congregation and that it enable more vital community life.
- 2- That the new structure respect our international nature:
  - a. promoting dialog and an exchange of life between the historical and those newer sectors of the Congregation.
  - b. respecting differences of culture and context that are present in the Congregation.
  - c. promoting communication and a sense of belonging to the Congregation.
- 3- That the new structure be effective in the areas of ministry to the young and vocation promotion, and that it permit the development of formation for the entire Passionist Family.
- 4- That the new structure express the option for the poor, together with our commitment to JPIC.
- 5- That the new structure promote and achieve solidarity of personnel and finances.
- 6- That the new structure respect the requirements of civil and canonical legislation.

## **ITINERARY AND STEPS**

After statement of the Criteria, we moved to a possible time-line to present to the Synod. However, this itinerary is also offered as a suggestion and can form the basis for dialog:

- **2006-2008:** The two years which have transpired since the 2006 General Chapter have been dedicated to the study of the Template/guide and to the responses within meetings of the Provinces, Vice-provinces, Vicariate, and Conferences in order to respond to the mandate of the Chapter itself regarding planning for Restructuring.
- **2008 - September:** General Synod of the Congregation.
  - a) Discern and agree on a possible “new configuration” of the Congregation.
  - b) Dialog about the “viability” of the new Entities.

- **2008–2010** - Verify the “viability” of what was decided at the Synod, address and resolve any possible difficulties.
- **2010** – The General Synod: confirm or modify the new Entities.
- **2010–2012** - Period of experimentation and verification of the “feasibility” of the new Entities; study of a new model for the General government and for the new Entities.
- **2012** - General Chapter. Decide and define the new Entities and approval of a new model for the General Government and for the new Entities.

## **SECOND PART**

### **REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSION OF THE ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONSES TO THE TEMPLATE/GUIDE**

In the meeting that took place in Rome last August 11 and 12 of the General Council and Sister Christine, the moderator of the Synod, the work of analyzing the responses to the Template/guide that was initiated at Las Presas was integrated and completed. The analysis focused on the Congregation as a whole that is expressed in its parts and on several salient questions which may help the Congregation to progress.

Generally the need for Restructuring is accepted, but in some areas there needs to be more work so that the Congregation finds a language and a common way of dealing with the concerns of mission.

### **METHODOLOGY AND PREMISES**

The Congregation has its own culture including guiding principles and beliefs that must be kept in mind to assist with the reflection and for the sake of progress. The communities, the provinces and the areas may be able to significantly improve their effectiveness with respect to their capacity for change and for reciprocal and institutional collaboration with other parts of the Congregation.

This includes a systemic analysis of the Congregation in all its parts which includes existing structures of the whole (system) and the parts (sub-systems).

Structures do not have a life of their own but are closely connected to charism and context, to leadership and membership, to resources of finance and personnel. Roles are being assumed on behalf of the Congregation through the ministry assigned to each one in the service of the mission.

Furthermore, they are useful instruments for understanding the Congregation, its decision-making processes, and the co-responsibility of the Superiors and the religious on the local, provincial and general levels for discernment and for decision making.

The cultural and contextual analysis helps us to understand how it is possible to work independently while still belonging to the same Congregation. A process of discontinuity during the time period of transition and change will be necessary together along with the need to find a new language for a new way of being together.

No analysis is ever complete; yet it is a step to help the organisation reflect on itself in a more objective way and move on to further analytic and theological reflection in relation to the Charism of the Congregation today. A Congregation is not just a business. It is an endeavour in faith to respond to God's call in today's world. Sometimes the zeal for the latter, so evident in the variety of ministries referred to, can lead to a neglect of organisational processes which, when understood and adhered to, can give the members ever greater freedom for leadership and membership. To this end, the analysis is an attempt to reflect on areas that could enhance the charism, rather than make judgments on what is or is not helpful.

Similarities and differences emerged that are good to keep in mind during this particular time of Restructuring.

## **SOME CONVICTIONS**

Most members really want their congregation to grow and develop into the future though some seem to just want it to support them till they themselves die. This is normal behaviour in any organisation. 100% adherence to policy is never a reality as organisations are made up of human beings who are also on their own journey.

And we ask ourselves: how do we include in the process those who absolutely do not want any change? Dialog is needed. The responses that are detailed in the Templates demonstrate the importance of this dialog as well as being united with each other and in our mission.

We are convinced about the principle of collaboration, but if this does not occur locally it is even more difficult in the Provinces and on the international scene. Different theologies and ecclesiologies get in the way of fully collaborating not just in the local areas but across the Congregation. There is a paradox in the reports between desiring the new and not wanting to be disturbed! At times Provinces were quite clearly in charge of their own process and did not look to the International for any guidance.

There was a definite move to work more closely with the laity and to involve them fully in Passionist ministry.

There are different understandings of the meaning of discernment and clarifying it could be very helpful to the Synod in making decisions in order to alleviate tensions and overcome doubts regarding the future.

## **CONNECTION BETWEEN THE RESULTS OF THE RESPONSES AND THE SYNOD**

Learning to collaborate within the Congregation is an objective of this Synod in Mexico. What is impressive is the expressed desire of the members to be deeply involved in their own organisational process and a willingness to work with the structures commission to achieve clarity about how to proceed with re-structuring. It is the nature of decisions that they involve choices and so do not please everyone. This is the piece that is difficult.

Some areas have opted in converging and unified ways to work together overcoming in many cases, their own limits for working with neighboring Provinces. For the most part however, each part of the Congregation is contributing to one universal mission and this is difficult to remember when local needs become overpowering and give the religious a sense of being needed by the people and a real sense of fulfillment in local ministry.

The report with the ten priorities chosen by the General Chapter is very extensive. While it seems that some areas are functioning from this perspective, others continue to do the same thing and adapt the priorities to their former activities. In the case of elderly provinces perhaps it is all they can do. However, sometimes the elderly in these templates seem more open than younger member provinces.

So how are the hard choices of allocation of personnel and finance in relation to mission going to be made? Who has the right to make these choices some people ask?

This raises issues of governance at Provincial Level and its connectedness to the International.

There is evidence in the reports that this Congregation struggles with governance. For some a more centralized model is acceptable and they do not see the point of reaching out across international boundaries. For most however, this internationality is crucial to their survival, especially in the developing world. Issues of dependency and independency especially as regards

skills and finances are at stake in this, especially for poorer countries who no longer want to be beholden to the developed world for ‘handouts’ but need the dignity of being by right equal members in a congregation that has its roots in the first world.

The most transformative aspect of the reports focuses on the ability the Congregation has to transcend institutional boundaries, to cope with differences in ministry, to reach across sectors and intellectual differences with an openness that shows that almost without perceiving it the Congregation is pioneering a way for laity in society who often get locked into one sector or the other.

### **ANALYSIS OF THE CONGREGATION**

Analyzing all the written reports one can see an interconnection in the Congregation and how each part contributes to the general mission. We can state that within the boundary of the mission of the Passionist Congregation and the way in which this Congregation through its leaders and members, its resources and finances and its structures is ‘fit for purpose’ or ‘relevant’ to the changing context of a global world.

Looking at the results of the Templates as a whole the following issues emerged:  
-- There is clarity about the mission of the Congregation even if it is expressed differently in various cultures and contexts. Some entities that are more traditionally oriented are trying to be like the first religious of the Congregation, giving priority to the itinerant preaching ministry. For those Provinces or entities that have agreement on this, focused on a typical Passionist response, courageous decisions have already been made in relation to leaving institutions and parishes so as to serve the Church and Society in a different and authentic way for their particular context. However what is evident is that in some contexts the Congregation is responding exactly to these institutional needs because currently this is the need of the people as they are in a stage of development. And this is a courageous decision for them.

Now we ask ourselves: Is this Congregation able and willing to cope with difference in its organisational responses to mission and at the same time being inter-connected and united in its mission? How can these provinces/entities be helped to understand that they can learn something from the other parts of the Congregation that can help to improve it? If the sense of community and mission is strong enough, everything is possible. If the international mission is clear, if there are clear policies, shared responsibility and lines of accountability, this amount of difference can be sustained.

Other questions: To join provinces that are declining, but economically secure in order to resolve crises of leadership and formation in these areas – does this serve the overall mission of the Congregation? What can be done “now” in the Congregation so that the mission can develop in the future? Can this Synod explore the understanding of the Congregation as a whole in relation to the parts and the contribution of each part to that whole so as to be clear about what common organizational frameworks will sustain the mission in its parts as well as a whole? The overall response is one of openness to change even if the processes to achieve this are not clear.

### **CO-RESPONSIBILITY AND DECISIONS**

Within the Templates, there is little reference to the rights and responsibility of members. Rather there is an impressive concentration on “service” and “community” both within and

without the Congregation. There is a concentration too on the role of leader as though they are the only ones with responsibility and authority.

For new structures to be successful, the passivity of members is challenged to be transformed into roles of co-responsibility where each member takes inner authority for their responsibility for that part of the congregation where they are involved in ministry at the request of the Province or Congregation. Members desire that decisions which affect the local scene be made as close to the ground as possible in a spirit of subsidiarity. This is strong throughout the reports. The weakness is in the way the whole reality of the Congregation is perceived. Although desirable, internationality is perceived as something difficult.

A further reflection on role-relatedness in relation to mission could perhaps free the members up to look at themselves in a different and encouraging way, realising that the ministry in which they are engaged, the particular role and task, is carried out on behalf of the whole congregation. This understanding could offer new life and vitality to young and old and give them a sense of their own inner authority.

There seems to be a fear of centralisation – giving too much power to the General Council or to the Provincial teams. But it will not be entirely like this; this is not the objective of Restructuring. A model needs to be found that enables the congregation to be co- responsible and interconnected.

At the same time, there is openness to adaptability, to coping with difference, to trying new ways and walking new paths.

#### **CULTURAL AND CONTESTUAL ANALYSIS**

Although contextual analysis was not referred to directly there are sure signs that provinces have done their work of conversion through the economic, social, political reality with a view to focusing more on the injustices that prevent people living with dignity. There is plenty of evidence that the poor and deprived are at the forefront of the choice of priorities in most places.

Tools of cultural and contextual analysis may be useful for further reflection in international communities and formation experiences so as to value cultural diversity and work at it in a consistent way.

The analysis of the responses to the Schema/guide for the planning of Restructuring offered as an aid to the Synod, is focused on the Congregation seen as a “whole” that is expressed in its parts and in some emerging questions that may help it to progress, ends with a question:

***Will the Congregation will take a few, small steps slowed by apprehension and fear or will it make a giant leap of faith forward – which is what the majority of religious want even if they don't know how to achieve it? We, as a Synod, have the task and mission to discern and decide.***

## **THIRD PART**

### **EVENTS AND CELEBRATIONS**

#### **Canonization of St. Charles Houben**

A very special celebration was the canonization of St. Charles Houben of Mount Argus that took place in Rome, in St. Peter's Square on 3 June 2007. In addition to the participation of the PATR Province of Ireland where the new Saint worked and where his relics are venerated, and the SPE Province of the Netherlands where he was born, it was another occasion to reaffirm to the Congregation and to the Church that holiness is possible in the ordinary events of life and ministry if they are constantly lived in the presence of God and in intimate union with Him. It is said of St. Charles: he was a masterpiece of the wisdom of God; a true son of the Passion that used every opportunity to bring the poor and the sick the message of the Cross, someone who was always ready to visit them and comfort them in the hospitals of Dublin and in their homes. What an example!

I want to underline the good work of the General Postulation with Fr. Giovanni Zubiani, assisted by the Vice-postulators of the two provinces, Fr. Joachim Van der Heijden (SPE) and Fr. Paul Francis Spencer (PATR).

#### **The Cause of the Beatification of Fr. Theodore Foley**

The last General Chapter in October, 2006, approved by means of proposal No. 7, the Cause of the beatification and canonization of Fr. Theodore Foley, Superior General of the Congregation, who died in Rome on 9 October 1974. On 15 January 2007 the General Postulator consigned to the competent office of the Vicariate of Rome, the "libello" and the various documents requested for the introduction of the Cause.

On 3 May 2007, the then Cardinal Vicar of Rome, Camillo Ruini, issued the Decree by which he invited each and every member of the faithful to communicate or deliver to the Diocesan Tribunal of the Vicariate of Rome, all materials, written or otherwise, through which they can, in some way or other, collect information, favorable or unfavorable, to the reputation of sanctity of the Servant of God. (PIB, No. 13 and 14)

#### **Nomination of the General Curia and Generalate of Sts. John and Paul**

During the Consulta at the end of December, 2006, some personnel changes occurred for the service of the Curia and the Generalate:

Fr. Floriano De Fabiis (PIET) was named Procurator General; Fr. Ramiro Ruiz Betancourt (FID) was named Secretary General; Fr. Mirek Lesiecki (ASSUM) was reconfirmed Superior of the Community of Sts. John and Paul. Fr. Battista Ramponi (CORM), Fr. Giovanni Zubiani (CORM) and Fr. Kevin Dance (SPIR) were reconfirmed in their respective offices of General Econome, Postulator General and Non-governmental Representative (NGO) of the Congregation at the UN.

Among the proposals approved by the last General Chapter was No. 5 -- Peace, Justice and the Integrity of Creation. The Chapter decreed that there be constituted an Office for Solidarity and Mission and it established the objectives and decreed the norms. The Promoter of JPIC would be a full time position and it also specified the function of the Secretary General of the Missions.

Fr. Jesús María Aristín Seco (CORI) was named to this office. He is a former Provincial Consultor and he directed an analogous office of JPIC in his Province in Bilbao.

### **Bethany**

Last April the General Council had the opportunity to spend ten days in our house of Bethany on the heights of the Mount of Olives for a period of spiritual retreat and to visit the places of the Holy Land. It was also a moment to evaluate the status of the community and their future plans. Last August Fr. Apolinario Plaza (PASS), former Provincial Superior and recently Provincial Consultor and pastor in Calumpang on the island of Mindanao, was appointed the new local Superior of the community. Currently, the community of Bethany is composed of four religious: Fr. Apolinario Plaza (PASS), Superior; Fr. Sebastian Walak (ASSUM) Econome; Fr. Gianni Sgreva (CORM); and Fr. Roberto Martínez López (SANG). In the letter that I sent to the community informing them of the arrival of the new Superior, I urged them to continue the process and the projects that were re-confirmed during our last visit, so that the community would be at the service of the local Church through the traditional ministries of the Congregation: spiritual direction for groups, hospitality and formation, and by association through Passionist presence in the initiatives already existing in the Holy Land for ecumenical dialog and relations with other religions, and in conjunction with our presence at the U.N.

### **World Youth Day**

Last July for the first time the Congregation celebrated World Youth Day as an “event” for the Passionist Family. In the course of two weeks we had three Passionist meetings in Australia.

The first of these was the Meeting of Young Passionists that involved approximately 70 religious, the majority of which were young religious of the Congregation: religious were present from the entire Congregation. The meeting that took place at our retreat house in Templestowe, centered on the Charism as an expression of the life and experience of our Founder – on community life and our mission. The third day of the meeting included an extensive dialog with the General Council about the mission and about our future. There were many questions from the young religious about Restructuring.

The second phase of the meeting was the Passionist Youth Event that involved our young religious and about 350 young people from all parts of the world who were associated with our communities and parishes or with the Passionist Sisters. During the various days we met in our church and parish of Endeavour Hills on the outskirts of Melbourne. These gatherings were characterized by extraordinary organization that was also seen in the liturgical celebrations and life together.

The dynamic of the meeting was comprised of catechesis and sharing of our spirit and was focused on the concerns of the young and their identification with the Cross of Jesus.

The third meeting was the World Youth Day itself in Sydney. All of our religious and the young people were housed in our parish of Marrickville in Sydney, some in the community residence and others in the houses of the parishioners near to us and from where they participated in all the events and celebrations of WYD.

I wish to thank the SPIR Province for the organization, hospitality and generosity. The religious were totally available to us so that everything went as well as possible. Also noteworthy, together with the community, was the joyful and efficient collaboration of the laity of Templestowe, of Endeavor Hills and of Marrickville Sydney.

### **A new Passionist Bishop**

This past 6 August, feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus, in the Cathedral of Mandeville, Jamaica, West Indies, dedicated to our Holy Founder, our confrere, Fr. Neil Tiedemann (PAUL) was ordained bishop.

The General Consultors Fr. Denis Travers and Fr. Clemente Barrón were present to offer the greetings and best wishes of the General Council and the entire Congregation, sentiments that I also repeat today in the presence of the PAUL Provincial Superior, Fr. Joseph Jones, to whom I also extend these greetings as well as to the religious of the Province of St. Paul of the Cross and the family of the new bishop.

We also wish to pray for Bishop Neil and the diocese of Mandeville “in memory” of his predecessor, Bishop Paul Boyle, CP, that he may be a “prophet of hope” in a land that is characterized by so many problems and such great poverty. In the line of the Apostles, may he be a witness to the Gospel of the Cross that saves.

**Two thoughts come to mind when one of our Passionist religious is chosen to be a bishop:** one of joy, for one of our religious receives the fullness of the priesthood and is a gift that the Congregation offers in service to the Church; the other is “sadness” because in a certain sense, it is a “loss” to the Congregation who can no longer directly benefit from his charism and his service. However, our communion with them that is always marked by our charism, by fraternity and by the joy of giving for the Reign of God overcomes any sense of loss.

### **In Memoriam**

To the joy of this new episcopal consecration there is also united the happy memory of the last three Passionist bishops who we pray are already sharing the beatific vision of the Trinity.

First of all, I wish to remember **Bishop Celestino Orbe Uriarte** who died on 18 July 2008 in our community of San Isidro in Lima, Peru. He served in the Prelature Moyobamba in the Peruvian Amazo.

**Bishop Mauro Pereira Bastos (VICT-DOL)** died at the age of 51, in Brazil, near the city of Belo Horizonte, in a tragic traffic accident on 14 September, 2006, the day of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, approximately one month prior to the last General Chapter of 2006. We remembered him during the Chapter itself (Cfr. PIB, April 2007); however we also wish to remember him once again at this time for this dedication to pastoral ministry, his care for the poor and his preaching charism, together with his episcopal motto: “Through the Cross to the light!”

**Mons. José Ramon Santos Iztueta (CORI)** who died on 27 August 2007 due to an illness that he sustained while substituting for a pastor of the diocese. I met him during my visit to Peru together with the General Council, in February, 2007 on the occasion of my participation in the COPAL Conference and my visit to the CORI-RES Vicariate during which we had the opportunity to also become familiar with part of the three dioceses that were pastorally served by three Passionist bishops: the Diocese of Callo, the areas near the airport of Lima – Bishop Miguel Irizar; the Diocese of Yurimaguas with Bishop José Luis Astigarraga and the Prelature of Moyobamba by the then Bishop Santos Iztueta, in the interior of the Peruvian Amazon. I was with him in the General Council from 1982 to 1988. I recall his humanity and the joy that we shared in working together. The impossible never existed for him. As bishop of Moyobamba, he was responsible for all of San Martín, the interior region, also visiting the smallest village regardless of how remote. His was not an “office” bishop; rather he was a travelling bishop, who

knew the shortcuts and paths through the jungle. Perhaps those who were most saddened by his death were the Peruvian immigrants in Rome and in Peru who were cared for by him and who tried to resolve their problems. His episcopal motto was: “The servant of the Lord” – first and foremost. This was the core of his life. (PIB, October 2007.)

**Bishop Paul M. Boyle (CRUC)** died at the beginning of this year, on 10 January 2008. I recall his dedicated service to the Congregation as Superior General from 1976 to 1988 and his strong sense of belonging. Particularly noteworthy was his guidance and direction of the General Chapter of 1982 during which, in the light of the Second Vatican Council and the charism of the Passion, our present Constitutions were formulated, characterized by profound humanity and prophetic insight.

Bishop Boyle had a very profound sense and belief of being “cum ecclesia”, both as Provincial Superior of the Holy Cross Province (CRUC), 1968-1976, and as Superior General and Bishop. I had the opportunity and the grace of participating as Provincial Superior at the General Chapter of 1982 and then as General Consultor for the six years of his second mandate as Superior General. The years that I spent with him were unforgettable, a learning experience, on the General Council that gave four bishops to the Church. In addition to Bishop Boyle, I also recall with fraternal affection Bishop Norbert Dorsey (PAUL), Bishop William Kenney (IOS) and the late Bishop José Santos Istueta.

He was a man of great dedication and zeal for the missionary activity of the Congregation and attention to situations of poverty. For this reason he was an active member of the Conference of Major Superiors of the American religious, and he was also its president from 1969 to 1974. He, together with two other congregations, in 1976, founded the “Religious Communities Trust” to offer financial guidance to religious communities.

I also wish to remember him as a generous Pastor of the Apostolic Vicariate of Mandeville, in Jamaica, West Indies; his motto as bishop was: “In the Cross is our Hope.”

He courageously and professionally addressed complex problems dealing with personnel and the organization of the newly formed Diocese located in a very poor area and therefore, with great social tension. Even after term of his service as bishop ended and he retired in 2004 to the Passionist community of Louisville, KY, he was still very active. He was active in appeals for “*Food for the Poor*”, in sacramental ministry and preaching.

The illness and suffering of his final days purified in him that human weakness that is part of all of us: he shared in the Passion of Jesus that he professed.

### **The Historical Commission.**

With the deaths of Fr. Paulino Alonso and Fr. Fabiano Giorgini, the historical commission needs need to be completely reconstituted. Currently Fr. Fernando Piélagos (FAM) is organizing the work and the research done by Fr. Paulino.

We all understand the importance of our history for spirituality and for formation, especially of our young religious and for the Passionist Family. In history we discover the breath of God and his presence that is at work via human mediation with its fidelity, errors and decisions. The Congregation also has its history that courses through time within the history of the Church and the world; the charism becomes visible through its choices, its life and its works both of the religious and also the Congregation as a whole with its various entities. It is the task of historians to research, recount and make known. Theirs is a ministry of formation that enables spiritual growth which becomes the culture of life.

The last General Chapter also highlighted the importance of our History with the approval of Proposal No. 2 that invited the Provincials and their Councils to promote, within the next six years, gathering of documentation and the writing of a history of each province.

But we need to be more aware of the need to encourage our young religious to study, in particular specializations and with degrees in Church History, who can then be available for the study of the History of the Congregation. The major Superiors should have a sense of responsibility in this area.

### **A brief memorial reflection: Fr. Paulino Alonso and Fr. Fabiano Giorgini**

**Fr. Paulino Alonso (FAM)** was sent to Rome in 1951 to study Church History. His ministry in the Generalate of Sts. John and Paul was multifaceted: Fr. Malcolm La Velle, the then Superior General, in 1953 named him General Archivist and in 1958 a member of the newly created Historical Commission. He was a translator at General Chapters and Synods and a preacher of spiritual exercises and retreats.

He returned to his Province in 1964 to be director of theology students and to devote himself to teaching. In 1986 he was recalled to Sts. John and Paul to undertake the study of the History of the Congregation of the period of Fr. Antonio Testa, Superior General from 1839 to 1862, during which he prudently guided the religious and made foundations in other cultures outside Italy.

During the past 21 years of his presence in Rome he made a great contribution to historical research and to Passionist spirituality. He gave numerous conferences, including to our novices and students and he devoted himself to hospitality, especially toward our university students who arrived at Sts. John and Paul from around the Passionist world.

We thank him for his service to the Congregation and the witness that he gave, even when his health was failing and his illness became serious and incurable. He died on 19 May 2007 and Fr. Fabiano Giorgini in his homily at the funeral said: *“he gave himself completely, like a lamp whose oil has been consumed, without any particular commotion and with complete abandonment to the will of God.”*

### **Fr. Fabiano Giorgini (PIET)**

For many years, 28 April, prior to the liturgical reforms, was the feast of our Founder and on this day this year, 2008, in the Retreat of Sts. John and Paul, Fr. Fabiano Giorgini died – an historian and devoted son of St. Paul of the Cross. Having earned a degree in Church History, he served his province and the Congregation as Provincial Consultor, Provincial and Vicar General. However the most outstanding dimension of his life was his historical research and his studies of Passionist spirituality that paralleled his presence in chapter commissions and participation at General Chapters and Synods of the Congregation during the period of great turmoil following Vatican II. He was president of the Historical commission, also composed of Fr. Enrico Zoffoli and Fr. Paulino Alonso. Also noteworthy are the courses in the history and the spirituality of the Congregation that he gave, often together with Fr. Paulino, for the religious of Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Indonesia, Italy and elsewhere. From these courses came the initiative for the series, *“Research in Passionist history and spirituality”*, booklets that contributed to the formation of many young religious and that made Passionist values known; this together with the many books that he published. (PIB, July 2008)

One activity to which he gave particular attention and care was the updating of the Passionist cloistered nuns and for the various branches of the Congregations of Passionist women religious.

He lived life intensely, never slowing down even during his final years. He worked unceasingly as a spiritual guide and as a scholar, tenaciously dedicated to completing the History of the Congregation. He was diagnosed with an fast-moving incurable illness that abbreviated his days of suffering and purification. Fr. Fabiano is a religious who, together with other Passionists, were protagonists, in various ways, in witnessing to the vitality of the charism in their time and who will continue to enlighten it in the future.

**Highgate** is where our house and parish in London, England (IOS) is located. For several years the Province of St. Joseph had planned to relinquish the parish of St. Joseph in Highgate to the Diocese of Westminster and to develop a plan of urban development for the area of the property of the Province that is annexed to our retreat and church. Recently, the General Council collaborated with the Province to facilitate this plans. However, last June, following a meeting with the IOS Provincial and his Council and in the midst of some significant difficulties, we were able to negotiate an agreement with the Diocese of Westminster. We decided that in October, 2008 and for the future, the General Council will assume responsibility for providing Passionist religious for the parish of St. Joseph.

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor approved this decision and we have now named Fr. Patrick Fitzgerald (PATR) as pastor and Fr. Raymond Brain (SPIR) parochial vicar. We want to thank the provinces of St. Patrick and Holy Spirit for their generous response and for making these religious available for this mission.

This and the subsequent dialog with the Province of St. Joseph led to the decision for the General Council to now assume responsibility and to assure a Passionist community for Highgate and, in collaboration with the IOS Province, we will facilitate the completion of the previously established development of the property.

While we cannot make a hypothesis for the future and are awaiting further orientations and decisions of the Restructuring process, we believe that major world cities like London will become more important to us as bases for future new evangelization to a modern Europe and indeed to the wider English speaking world.

#### **ADDITONAL BRIEF INFORMATION**

##### **The Library of the Passion**

It is our intention to create in Rome, in the area below the refectory of Sts. John and Paul, a Library of the Passion including the transfer of the Stauros collection of books that are currently located in our house at Wezembeek-Oppem in Belgium (GABR).

Once the transfer of the collection has been decided and when it is confirmed that there are no legal or other kind of obstacles, the project will take place. For further information, please see the General Econome.

##### **Formation Courses**

Next October, 2009, we are sponsoring a formation program for the formation personnel of the Conference of Africa (CPA). The programs will center on the Charism and on the

spiritual and practical aspects for planning and instituting formation program designed specifically for the Region.

### **Internet**

We are continuing our studies to single out and choose an internet communications system that is more integrated and suitable to our reality.

### **CONCLUSION**

Dear brothers of the Congregation, it has been four years since we decided to begin the process of Restructuring and now, as were the disciples in the gospel verse from Matthew that I cited at the beginning of the Report, we are in the midst of the sea, on the waters of the lake of Gennesaret. Perhaps there are fears and doubts. Why should we go to the other shore? Isn't it better to return to the shore from which we departed? It's familiar to us and reassuring. Like Peter who stepped out of the boat in a leap of faith, does it seem that we dared too much? Are the winds too strong and the waters too turbulent? Will we lose our sense of security and begin to sink? The lack of faith makes the danger represented by the waters even more dramatic. *"And immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught Peter and said to him: 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?'"* (Mt. 14:29-31)

Peter was reassured by the word of the Lord: *"Come"*; but he was also afraid of the storm; it is as if his soul is divided. He is not sure if he should trust in the word of Jesus or be attentive to the power of his terror. Doubting and wanting to put Jesus to the test, *"if it is you"*, make his faith seem meager. But when he finally cries out: *"Lord, save me!"* he humbly accepts to place himself in his arms. Peter truly represents each of us and the Church: when we turn our eyes to the Lord and are attentive to his call we have faith and we advance along the road. When we look at our difficulties we become frightened and we sink. Believing is also daring. The one who dares is sustained by the one in whom he believes. With Jesus in the boat the wind subsides and the waters become calm again and navigation is possible.

For us, arriving at the other shore is acquiring a new "congregational" mentality, overcoming the fragmentation of thinking only as individual provinces with our own needs and our own mission. Together we need to address, gathered in the same boat, the reality of our Congregation at the present moment, located in the entire world and in diverse cultures, as also emerged in the responses to the Template. We need to make choices that allow us to overcome limits and difficulties that impede us from being what God wants us to be today and what the world expects of us. The challenge that we need to address is being capable of reflecting in a new way and find ways of sharing the charism and our poverty and our wealth, and the charisms of different cultures.

However, I feel the need to positively underline the growth of the Congregation in the areas of the exchange of people and roles, in collaboration and in communal planning. I wish to thank the Provinces and the religious who have placed themselves at the disposition of the Congregation to meet its needs and to constitute international communities such as Bethany, St. Joseph's on Monte Argentario, Sts. John and Paul, Highgate and others.

During this Synod we will take additional steps and we will consolidate foundations that will help us to build new visions about how we can express solidarity more concretely and realistically in personnel and finances. The Gospel demand of giving obliges us to discern those things that are most precious, even to sharing our own sense of belonging. We may be called to

choose between the priorities of a Province and the priorities of the Congregation. The Synod of 2004 and the last General Chapter gave us the mandate to give new life and energy to mission and it selected Restructuring as a way of strengthening the organism of the Congregation. We are united at a point in the journey where there is no longer any discussion about “Restructuring or not”; there is only what kind of Restructuring? Which model of Congregation should we use for a Passionist presence in today’s world that is more effective and a greater sense of solidarity among the various parts and cultures of the Congregation itself? The urgency of the problems and crisis situations that exist in numerous areas of the Congregation, which in unknown ways can be openings to new life, do not permit us to remain inert. We are aware that the need for collaboration is no longer only dependant on good will, but also on institutional decisions. Life asks us to arrive at the other shore. We cannot remain at the crossroads, because we know that an excess of prudence often becomes weakness and untrustworthiness. Now is the time for change, for “pruning the branches” of our reality so that the plant can have more energy and a capacity to bear more fruit: *“Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more.”* (Jn.15:2)

Before concluding, I want to recall the three temptations from which we need to flee in implementing the process of Restructuring. These were in the conclusion of the Report on the State of the Congregation presented at the last General Chapter. About 40% of the participants at this Synod are in their first mandate as major Superiors or did not participate at the last General Chapter and it is presumed that some will complete their service prior to the next Synod or General Chapter and therefore, it is necessary again review the process of Restructuring and to be in harmony with it by means of acquiring a “congregational mentality”, reviewing the path already traveled, keeping updated and disposing oneself with open mind and heart, to enter into its perspective. It is in this spirit that in the first part of the Report I briefly reviewed the various steps of the process and now I wish to recall the three temptations from which we must flee in order to proceed with our work in this Synod.

The first one is that of trying to find quick solutions and techniques without bothering to fathom the very roots of our consecrated being. This temptation of seeking shortcuts under the illusion of saving time only prolongs the invested time, as it produces superficial solutions and not infrequently causes one to lose sight of the road.

The second temptation is that of the prophet Elijah who, wishing to die, says, *“This is enough, O Lord! Take my life...”* (I Kg 19:4). This is the temptation of demoralization and throwing in the towel, of just drifting when confronted with difficulties, old age, sickness and even life itself. Our road, as was Elijah’s, is at on a level of faith and prophecy: keeping faith is in itself both mission and proclamation.

The third temptation to be avoided is that of Zechariah or incredulity. It does not believe that things will ever change, that new life can sprout – that Elizabeth, his wife, will conceive despite her old age. What is comforting to us is that the incredulity of Zechariah does not become an obstacle to the plans of God – John the Baptist will be born. God works despite our poverty.

I wish to fraternally greet and thank the General Consultors for their work and for their proficient collaboration in serving and encouraging the Congregation and for the suggestions that they offered in preparing this Report.

I wish to thank the Province of Christ the King, each and every one of its religious, especially the Provincial Superior, Fr. Francisco Valadéz, the Council, the Passionist Family and

all those who collaborated in the preparation of the Synod. Again I happily recall the days that I spent with you during the first week of this past June here in Cuernavaca when I was here for the celebration of the Provincial Chapter. It was an experience marked by a fraternal spirit and dialog that I am certain will be repeated during this event. I also wish to greet and thank the religious of the Holy Family Province (FAM) that live and minister here in Mexico.

Let us place the Synod under the protection of the Virgin Mary, whose nativity we celebrated yesterday. We invoke her as the Mother of God, the Virgin of Guadalupe, Patroness of Mexico: may she protect us and grant us the simplicity of heart of Juan Diego so that we may listen to God who speaks to us, in order to understand the plans that He has for the mission of the Congregation for the world of today and tomorrow, and may we have the courage to make good decisions.

Have courage! With the verse of the Gospel of this past Sunday, the Lord has reaffirmed that He accompanies us and is present among us: *“Because where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”* (Mt.18:20).

We do not see Him, but surely He is here among us and in these days we will welcome his presence. Amen. Amen. May our work be successful!

Cuernavaca 9 September 2008

P. Ottaviano D’Egidio  
General Superior.