

44th General Chapter of the Congregation of the Passion

“Passion of Jesus Christ, Passion for Life”

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This is the account of an extraordinary experience of community, of prayer, dialogue and reflection shared by a hundred members of the Passionist family, who took part in the 44th General Chapter of the Congregation of the Passion of Jesus, convoked by the Superior General Fr. José Agustín Orbegozo c.p. The Chapter was held at Itaiçá in the São Paulo State, Brazil, from August fourteenth to September fourteenth, 2000, at the time of year when the mild Brazilian winter was coming to an end and the signs of Springtime rebirth were emerging in the countryside round about.

There were 70 capitulars and six lay Passionists, assisted by a back-up team of secretariate, translators, animators of liturgy and a number of zealous co-operators from among our Brazilian Brethren. Secretary of the Chapter was Fr. Gabriele Cingolani (PIET), helped by two co-secretaries; Moderator was Bro. Paul Michalenko, S.T., from the U.S.A.

The capitulars came from 26 nations and from all five continents, and communicated in the three official languages of the chapter – Italian, English and Spanish – with occasional contributions in Portuguese and French. They were united in a single Spirit and by the same Passionist charism, around the central theme: Passion of Jesus Christ, passion for Life

Introduction

The 44th General Chapter took place in an ecclesial and geographical context replete with challenges and "provocations". Its celebration occurred:

- during the great Jubilee of the year 2000, anniversary of the Incarnation, a year of special invitation to conversion and to proclaiming the mercy and abundance of grace granted to us by Christ Crucified and Risen
- at an historical moment of epochal change, dominated by the pervasive phenomenon of globalisation, an economic process that in many ways disadvantages the poor of the world, and which calls on believers to struggle for the demands of justice .
- in a period when the Church acutely requires the inculturation of the Gospel in diverse cultures and, thus, the promotion of unity in diversity, in contrast with the dominant tendency that tends to homogenize behaviour, values and cultures.
- in the midst of a visible aging of the Congregation in its historical areas and its growth in new areas – a situation which demand new organizational structures and sense of solidarity.

For the first time, the Chapter was held outside of Italy, in Brazil, in a land of wealth and great poverty, of both old and new Evangelisation, in a region where globalisation exhibits its most negative aspects and where life is threatened in many ways; and yet where religion succeeds in uniting its festive character along with a strong sense of social commitment.

For the first time at a General Chapter, lay people from various secular Passionist movements were invited, who witnessed to the vitality of our charism, embraced with ardour and enthusiasm. The whole of the second week of the Chapter was enriched and enlivened by the presence of six lay people, representing the lay Passionist movements in Asia, Europe, North and Latin America.

For the first time, a Chapter was "telematic" or computerised, and in this way "open" to all Passionists and to the world. Its web-page "PassioChristi.org" sent out a daily chronicle of the

Chapter (including photographs), and offered the possibility of interaction. Each day, hundreds of Passionists and our friends received by e-mail a report of the Chapter's work. In this way, the capitulars accepted the challenge of opening up to all others who might wish to electronically join in with the work in the Chapter-hall.

In this context of both novelty and challenge, the theme of the Chapter, "*Passion of Jesus Christ, Passion for Life*" appeared not only timely, but prophetic. It anchored the Chapter's work to the Passion, the fountain-head of our charism, while projecting creatively toward the future, seeking ways to combat the culture of death and work for the triumph of life, with justice and peace.

In Brazil, the capitulars found new echoes and stimuli on the theme of *passion for life*. In fact, the newer theological tendencies in Latin America are concerned with the protection of life and the defence of the dignity of human beings and of all creation. It came as a pleasant surprise to find that the consecrated life of that continent is also seeking new vigour, in projects centred on the God of life, of tenderness and abundant grace, who rouses His children to creative freedom and to solidarity. Our encounters with the exuberant Brazilian religious spirit, with its festive liturgies, its theatrical gestures in actualising the Word of God and its strong denunciation of social injustices, all helped to situate the capitulars in a dynamic and creative atmosphere.

1. The Chapter Prayed

The Chapter took place within an intense climate of prayer. Every day, the work of the Chapter was sustained at the table of the Word and of the Eucharist since our reflection on life needed to be nourished at the source of our life, who is Christ.

Prayer and Chapter were never seen as sharply distinct moments, but as one reality, where prayer was Chapter, and Chapter prayer. The liturgy commission played an outstanding part, showing inexhaustible creativity in fusing the daily liturgy with the work being done in the Chapter Hall and in the smaller groups as well as with the visits we made outside Itaici. They had recourse to a language that is rather new to our tradition, that of gestures and signs. These signs (the shape of a heart, a cord, fire, footprints to the cross, the baking of bread, etc.) were "word" and "challenge", inviting us to contemplate the action of grace and the force of evil, and review our fidelity to the Passionist charism, to reaffirm our discipleship, strengthen our commitment for justice and embrace our brother.

Among the most eloquent signs was that of Jacob's Well, surrounded by water-jars. This was a clear reference to the Convocatory Letter of the Chapter, sent by Father General, Jose Agustin Orbegozo, whose main theme was the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. The well symbolizes the source of life, the place of meeting with Christ our "life-made-visible" and our fullness of life. It is where we are invited to lay aside outworn traditions and habits, in order to worship God "in spirit and truth." The Jars became symbols of the historical forms in which the Passionist charism was expressed .

In the opening ceremony, the capitulars gathered around a reproduction of the well. Beside it was a chipped jar, sign of something broken and outworn. The Chapter thus began with an

admission of infidelity and in-authenticity, and asked for pardon with a view to beginning on a new path. Some days later, the scene around the well was further dramatized, with a jar of water being shattered on the ground, splashing the liquid around the altar. The Passionist charism needs to be expressed in forms, like the jar, but these forms can also become a prison. From time to time we need the courage to break with by-gone forms, so that the charism can expand and spread. Many parts of the Chapter's prayer took place around the well.

Two images dear to Passionists were enthroned in the Chapter Hall: that of Calvary surmounted with the Cross, and the paternal image of our founder, St. Paul of the Cross.

2. The Chapter Listened

a) The Superior General's Report on the State of the Congregation

This was entitled "what we have seen and heard, we announce also to you" (1 Jn 1,3), and had been circulated to the capitulars in advance of the Chapter. Fr. José Agustín gave a brief overview, highlighting some central problems needing to be addressed, in particular, Ongoing Formation, a vital law for every institute; inculturation of the charism to render the initial vision of Paul of the Cross intelligible in other historical and cultural contexts; the adapting of our apostolate, structures and forms of presence to new situations; life of community as a place of communion and sharing; defining the identity of the institute and the integration of laity into the charism and mission of the congregation. Overall, the report invited to hope, even though to a crucified hope, one to be lived with patience, in difficult times.

b) The Message of the Pope

A strong message of encouragement and illumination was sent by Pope John Paul II to the Superior General and capitulars. The Pope asked the Passionists "to continue to be masters of prayer and special witnesses of Christ Crucified," and to draw strength from the Eucharist to make our entire life a remembrance and following of the Crucified One, eager to draw life from the mystery of the cross and *generously to cultivate the passion for life, above all, through dialogue and sharing*. In one passage he notes how "*the Crucified Christ has loved us 'to the end' (Jn 13:1), beyond the measure and possibilities of human love. This is the source from which the Passionist must draw his proper spirituality, in a particular way: to love where it is most difficult to love; to love where it is most needed. Today's society offers infinite scope for this apostolate.*" Pope John Paul invited Passionists to continue to "spread devotion to the Passion of Christ among the people and in every circumstance," by the preaching of popular missions and retreats, but adding that, "it will be necessary to think up new pastoral methods according to the needs of diverse cultures and traditions." Regarding sharing our Passionist charism with the laity, the Pope recognized this as "a sign of ecclesial life, urging reception and development." He trusts that "those whom the Spirit calls to draw from the same fonts" will find the religious to be "brothers and, above all, guides able to form them in an authentic Passionist spirituality."

c) "Narratives of Passionist Life"

The capitulars re-read and commented on the "Narratives of Passionist Life" gathered by the Chapter Preparatory Commission. They were moved and edified, knowing that what was published was only a small part of the reality. The capitulars reflected in groups and in the aula on these ordinary and extraordinary testimonies of heroism in living the Passionist

charism. They noted that of the hundred and ninety “testimonies”, thirty-six came from lay people, a sign of their sharing in the spirituality, life and mission of the congregation, and of their sense of belonging to the Passionist family.

The general impression was that of abundant life in the Passionist Family and that the charism of Paul of the Cross continues to be a font of inspiration, commitment and generosity, above all, in favour of the poor and the excluded, in all areas and situations in which Passionists live.

d) Talks delivered to the Chapter

These talks given by invited experts helped to deepen our discussions and widen our horizons. The first conference, by William Burrows, was on globalisation ¹ the dominant social-economic system that places economy as an absolute value to which all else must be adjusted, that marginalizes religion, forgets and excludes the poor and considers creation as simply a set of consumer goods. This phenomenon cannot leave Christians indifferent and especially an Institute such as ours. There are no predefined prescriptions for responding to it, but the Cross always remains our criterion for judging human cultures. As missionaries we must form lay people capable of taking influential positions wherever decisions are made which help to shape the world. We must evangelise both rich and poor alike, proclaiming the requirements of justice and peace and stir up people’s sense of vocation to be the custodians of the Earth’s beauty .

The Chapter’s theme, “Passion of Jesus Christ, passion for life” was developed by a Passionist, Octavio Mondragon ². Yahweh is revealed as a God who intervenes passionately in history in answer to the people’s pleading. The greatest involvement is manifested in the Passion of Jesus Christ. God’s attitude also impels Christians to become allies of the poor, to listen to the voice of the excluded, of women, to assume a protective attitude in regard to creation. In brief, it invites to a review of our life as Passionists in the light of the Paschal Mystery: to die in order to give life.

The theological vision of life was treated in the conference by Brazilian theologian, Carlos Palacio S.J.³. The present culture is conscious that life has a beginning and an end, but fails to face the question of the origin and meaning of life. For the Christian the font of life is love of the Father. I exist because I have been loved, because I feel loved. If life has a beginning, it also has a goal, a future: The Resurrection of Jesus indicates it. Jesus profoundly loved life, opening himself to compassion towards the suffering, struggling to end suffering. The death of Jesus on the Cross is death to false forms of life. It’s life to give life.

Fr. Edenio Valle S.V.D. treated the theme of Religious Life in the Latin American Perspective⁴. For him, Religious Life is now at a significant crossroad. In its traditional form, it is losing its social visibility and its capacity to draw, to witness to the radical following of

¹ “Mission and Evangelisation today: the Passionists in face of globalisation, inculturation and inter-religious dialogue”. Burrows is commissioning editor with Orbis Books, New York, U.S.A.

² “Passion of Jesus Christ, passion for life”. Fr. Octavio is a theology professor in Mexico City, and a member of the Chapter.

³ Fr. Carlos Palacio is director of the Jesuit Centre for Higher Theological Studies, in Brazil

⁴ Fr. Valle, a psychologist with wide contacts among church circles in Latin America, addressed us on his “Vision of the process of Religious Life in Latin America at the turn of the century; journeys and changes”.

Christ, to assimilate the "new." It is not a question of just this or that aspect of religious life, but the totality of its life project. However the "new" hasn't as yet emerged, or at least is not yet clearly seen. In this moment of passage, the right attitude is that of Abram, when asked to sacrifice his own son. We need a sacrificial and exodus attitude, ready to be in the desert again.

Religious life is re-vitalized by starting from its three foundational elements: its manner of experiencing the God of the promise; its way of perceiving and discerning the questions that come from life as actually lived; its choice of suitable ways and means, to signify in today's culture the "here" and "now" of the Kingdom that is coming tomorrow. History asks the consecrated life to be a witness and agent of a prophetic transformation of the world in the perspective of the Kingdom.

Recent tendencies of Religious Life in Latin America may be called "life-centric," seeking a fuller synthesis between the experience of God and the apostolic option, within an attitude of contemplation-and-action, attentive to the Signs of the Times and the voice of the Spirit, strongly rooted in the surrounding context and in dialogue with the current religious culture; seeking to build a reconciled humanity worthy of the Son of God.

More than the theoretical search for a model, its task today is to make itself a model of the Holy Spirit.

e) The reports of the Regional Conferences, the Commissions and the General Econome

The Capitulars were helped to form a picture of the state of the congregation in all parts of the world, by hearing the presidents of the regional Conferences, plus the consultor for north Europe and the two North American provincials, all of which, with their admixture of light and shade, conveyed a strong passion for life.

Fr. Alfonso Iberri (REG) presented the proposals of the commission on government and solidarity. The picture of the congregation was completed with the reports of Fr. Giulio Zangaro (General Econome) and Arthur Carrillo, for the commission on economy for the Generalate.

3. The Chapter encountered

a) Some Front line apostolates

The capitulars attempted an immersion into the culture, religiosity and problems of the host Country. After only a few days, they had the opportunity to know, in a climate of prayer and reflection, ten projects of "front line apostolates" in the State of São Paulo.

One group went to a very poor zone in the Passionist Parish at Osasco where the people live in shacks, the children die from malnutrition and lack of medical assistance. One group of Lay Passionists, with the help of our students, organized a centre of assistance for children and their mothers. They regularly visit families assuring that the infants have the necessities for growth.

Another group also went to Osasco to visit the “Association House” which offers assistance to those suffering from HIV, drug dependence and alcoholism. In the same area, there is a house for street people. At Campinas, there was a meeting with marginalized women, those forced into prostitution in the red light district. A visit was also made to the “project of new life” for homeless children. In the centre of the camp for rural workers “without land”, there was a large bamboo cross encircled by 23 small crosses. Each one represented a woman or man who had died in the struggle to obtain land. The capitulars’ report was strong. They also were surprised by the warmth and enthusiasm with which the poor received them.

The day of the visits began with a liturgy of the Word and concluded with the Eucharist in which the capitulars recounted many stories of pain, misery, anger, struggle, but, above all, of hope for a life worthy of the children of God.

Another visit/pilgrimage was to the National Marian Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida, a centre of popular piety, where our Eucharistic celebration ended with a consecration to the Blessed Virgin. The capitulars also learned of the project of the Brazilian Bishops’ Conference, who organized a national “plebiscite” during the Chapter to put pressure on the IMF (International Monetary Fund) in order to obtain a reduction or cancellation of Brazil’s foreign debt. They joined in a demonstration of the “cry of the excluded” in Sao Paulo (on behalf of the poor, the land-less, etc.) on the occasion of the Brazilian national feast on September 7th.

b) The Brazilian Passionist Family

This was the liveliest of the encounters held during the chapter. The Province of Calvary, the four Passionist Vicariates and the Province of St. Gabriel of Passionist Sisters, Daughters of St. Paul of the Cross organized a meeting of the capitulars with the entire Passionist Family of the Country: priests, brothers, sisters, novices, students, postulants, laity of the various Passionist secular movements, and four Passionist Nuns from two cloistered monasteries. Some had travelled by bus for up to 24 hours in order not to miss the meeting. It was a veritable feast, with a galaxy of Passionist signs on T-shirts, posters of welcome, banners proclaiming the Passionist charism. This exuberant encounter began with the Eucharist, followed by lunch and an extensive range of entertainment; it ending with a reciprocal blessing with the imposition of hands upon each other’s head. It generated a memorable climate of contagious joy and fraternity, interspersed with songs, applause, dances into which people were drawn in spite of themselves. It was an experience of pulsating life, an expression of family vitality. The Eucharistic liturgy was exciting in its festive character, uniting spirit and body in the presence of God and the spirit of praise and fraternity.

This encounter was a joyous expression of pride in the sense of belonging to the Passionist charism, well expressed in the song “Sou passionista com muita orgulho” (I am proud to be a Passionist) that was sung many times. In subsequent discussions in the aula and in prayer, the capitulars remembered this unforgettable experience of energy, richness and variety of the Passionist charism. The Brazilian Passionists could not have offered a more eloquent manifestation of the cultural and spiritual richness of the country and, above all, of the vitality of the Passionist charism.

c) Other encounters

The first two weeks of the chapter were enriched by the presence of Fr. José Mauro Pereira Bastos c.p., nominated first bishop of Janaba (one of the poorest areas in Brazil). At the end of Fr. Mauros' first visit to his new diocese a neighbouring bishop said: "Now I know why they selected this Passionist for this area". We also had interesting meetings with Dom Luciano Mendes, S.J., Bishop of Mariana, former President of the Brazilian Episcopal Conference and on the day we made our remembrance of the martyrs, with Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns, Archbishop Emeritus of São Paulo .

4. The Chapter Reflected and Discussed

The centre of the capitulars' reflections was the theme, "Passion of Jesus Christ, passion for life". That life, born from the cross, was the interpretive key for all the Chapter's work, in its twofold aspect of "memory" and "prophecy". As memory, it called our gaze to the cross, from which new life flows, and as prophecy it called us to look at the tasks of the new millennium, with the eyes of the Crucified.

Discussion of the theme under many aspects, in small groups, in the aula, and in ad-hoc committees. took place in an atmosphere of serenity and of openness to the Spirit. It led to exchanges of such richness and variety that we can only offer an outline of them here, in hope that over the next six years it can be a help to the congregation in reflecting on our project. For convenience, the theme of Life has been sub-divided into seven closely interconnected points, with each one cross-referencing with all the others.

4.1 Passion for Life, Passion for the Passionist Charism

"The Passion of Christ is the most efficacious remedy for the ills of the world" (Const. 1) This intuition of our Founder is as true and valid as ever, today. It is all the more needed in a world marked by a culture of death which wishes to radically exclude God from life and has lost the capacity to understand existence as a gift for others.

The "memoria passionis" is above all the proclaiming of God's love for humanity. There is no greater love, than to give one's life for ones friends (Jn 15,13). Therefore, our Founder declares that the passion of Christ is the "Greatest and most wonderful work of divine love" (Letters). The "memoria passionis" announces the Good News of a life re-born from love. For Jesus gave his life on the cross that we might have life. "God so loved the world, that He gave His own Son, so that whoever believes in him may never die" (Jn 3,16)

The Passionist, therefore, is the one who takes on the outlook of the Crucified and Risen One and gives his life in order to share life ⁵ this calls for a re-creative fidelity to our charism. The struggle against the culture of death calls us to commitment to justice and peace, the defence of the poor and the excluded who are the "crucified" of today; to guarding the integrity of creation; and to intervening wherever life, in any of its forms, it being attacked.

⁵ Circular Letter of José Agustín Orbegozo, October 1995: "Open to an ever-deeper conversion to the mind of the Crucified One".

The remembrance of the Crucified One is the font of our passion for life. It renders a Passionist a contemplative (of life, in the passion of Jesus Crucified and Risen One) and a faithful witness to Life, in his passion for the community – a prophet of Life, in his passion for the world. This involves:

a) Accepting Life as Gift

As Passionists, we seek to have and cultivate an awareness of the gratuity of God's gifts. We see the ultimate reason for life in its multi-coloured and wonderful variety in the loving, passionate care that God the Father has for all creation.. Hence we accept every human being as a brother or sister. In the older areas of the congregation, marked by the advancing age of our personnel, this calls us to special care for the elderly and sick amongst us. And everywhere, we are called to respectful openness toward plurality, the valuing of other cultures and acceptance of their various modes of expression .

b) Passion for Life in communion

We seek to live our life as a passion for communion, a communion that goes well beyond mere living together, beyond self-sufficient individualism, beyond depersonalisation. It means creating communities that are gladly open to all who want to experience the Passionist family; communities that are a visible sign of reconciliation.

c) Passionate Defence of Life

Faith helps us to see human beings from God's perspective. We seek to make the difficult experience of Kenosis, and for this we are ready to root ourselves up and go out to the place of the poor, the marginalized, the disinherited. We want to go to where life is threatened, to hear the cry for justice, for a worthy human life, a sacred human life. We seek to constitute a Passionist family committed to the defence of life, capable of question, revising and discerning whatever in our practice and institutions does not correspond to this truth. St. Paul of the cross learned to find, to understand and serve the poor, on whose foreheads he saw written the holy name of Jesus.

d) Announcing the Good News of the Passion for Life in Jesus, Crucified and Risen

We seek as a Congregation and as a Passionist family to make of this time of *Kairos*, where the Word of the Cross is felt as Good News, as the foundational *Kairos*, fountain of life, and invitation to charismatic authenticity.

We desire a contemplation that allows us to enter into the Passion of Jesus for Life, a passion that Jesus lived in joyful communion with the Father, as compassion with the little, suffering ones, as a passionate denunciation of whatever threatened life, and a full offering of himself on behalf of all, with historic consequences that this involved for him.

4.2 Passion for Life, Passion for Inculturation

Inculturation is the process by which the seed of the Gospel takes root and shape in a particular soil. On the one hand, the Gospel challenges and purifies the cultures into which it comes, but on the other, it becomes incarnate by taking on characteristics of the culture where it is planted. Jesus, Son of God, was not only a Jew but a Galilean who could identify with the people of his time and place and speak their language. The Word was made flesh in ways that

were entirely appropriate to a particular environment and yet the universal truth he proclaimed has had the power to embrace and yet transcend the particularities of innumerable cultures ever since.

Inculturation requires a living dialogue between the Gospel and the various cultures in a critical process of adaptation, whereby the culture is judged by the Gospel and takes on its values. In this way, Christianity does not come like something alien from abroad, but enhances the innate values of the culture. Inculturation has reached its high point when an individual or community fully identifies with Christ.⁶

The law of inculturation touches all cultures, all institutions and all times. It applies also the Passionist charism which must be open to the Spirit attentive to the "Signs of the Times" and deeply respectful of the cultures where we work, with awareness of our own preconceptions and attitudes. The Passionist charism should be able to speak the language of every culture without losing touch with the Gospel values we come to share. The cross of Christ, as the greatest expression of love, remains the primary criterion of every "incarnation".

Inculturation is also the Gospel response to those aspects of globalisation that want to level and standardize all cultures .

4.3 Passion for Life: Passion for Community of Life and Apostolate

a) Community of life

For the Passionist, the primary setting where this passion for life is expressed is the community. We live together to form a community *of* life and *for* life.

We all feel a profound desire to be accepted in our uniqueness and diversity, to be respected and valued. We wish for a life of serene, gratifying fraternity, sustained by an exchange human and spiritual communication. We aspire to a life in communion, in which one is gift to the other, richness offered and received.

We all know, however, that communion is both gift and task.

First of all, it is a gift of God, constantly requested in communitarian prayer, matured in contemplation and above all received in the Eucharist, the source and sign of unity. In our community of life we continually need to go back to the spiritual reasons of our being together: the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of Jesus Christ, and our sharing the same Passionist charism.

Community of life is also task, one that needs continual conversion, a constant overcoming of egoism, a *kenosis*-capacity for reconciliation, to pardon and be pardoned. There is a penitential aspect in community which is inevitable, but is also a source of life and joy.

Such a community of life is a witness of "good news" to the world. The Passionist community is open to the outside world, toward those who wish to experience community

⁶ Burrows, William, in "Mission and Evangelisation today"

and prayer, especially the laity who share the same Passionist charism with us. Such a community is truly inculturated and in solidarity with all.

b) Community of Apostolate

The first form of our apostolate is the actual community of life, of prayer, of contemplation, when it exists as a counter-cultural witness in an egoistic and consumerist society. The apostolate must emerge from the community and be continually reviewed by it.

We are called to fulfil a particular service in the Church and in the world through proclaiming the Word of God and especially the *Word of the Cross*. We truly believe that the Passion of Christ is the greatest and definitive work of God for the life of people. The Lord we proclaim has come to bring life in abundance, that fullness of life that flows from the Cross.

To be faithful to our apostolic charism and to contribute in our special way to the new evangelisation, we must open ourselves courageously to renewal, starting always from the Cross of Christ, so that our apostolate in all its forms (traditional and new) may respond, as did that of Jesus, to the genuine needs of people today .

New situations of society require attention to the signs of the times and research and experimentation with new forms of apostolate, including professionally using modern means of communication plus a presence in places at the margins (new *Areopaghi*), especially where life is threatened and trodden down. At the same time we should keep up and revive our traditional, specific forms of the apostolate (like missions, retreats, spiritual direction, sacramental ministry), keeping alive the missionary zeal of St. Paul of the Cross.

4.4 Passion for Life, passion for initial and ongoing Formation

Formation is an essential, strategic element of our passion for life. It is vital, as an ongoing process of creative, inculturated fidelity to the charism we have received . It seeks continual deepening of our knowledge of the Sacred Scriptures and of theology, and all those branches of knowledge relevant to our spiritual life and apostolate .

Formation in the charism is a personal and communitarian process, which impels us to continue working to deepen our identity, through dialogue, discernment and listening. We should all joyfully feel ourselves called to this active process since in it we find the paschal life that is offered to us, and which we in turn can create, discover and share with others.

The privileged place where this vital process of growth occurs for us is within the Passionist community . This is where we hear the paschal stories that constitute our heritage, where we share our collective memory, and receive the elements of the charism that makes us family and constitutes our specific identity. It is also where we hear and discern the invitations that the Spirit is making to us.

As we desire community of life, we should underline those elements that make us men of community, fellow-hearers of the Word, called together for fraternal solidarity, contemplatives of the Crucified in the school of Paul of the Cross, lovingly attentive to His presence in the world, especially in the poor and marginalized .

So that the life flowing from our paschal God should constantly sustain our own lives, we need to drink at the well of our history, spirituality and theological reflection. And, so that our formation may open us up to the *today* of each present moment, we must not only keep learning to read the "Signs of the Times" but also know and value the culture in which we live, and use the means of communication that can make our message more effective

Consequently the process of formation to Passionist life, especially in its initial phases, needs the attention, care and commitment of the whole community alongside those to whom the task is especially entrusted. We are aware that the whole community has a formative role.

The passion for life and formation inevitably implies also a passion for promoting Passionist vocations. Trusting in the God who gives life, we see vocational promotion as the task of all and so we should present our way life as an authentic way of being human and Christian. We also give proper respect to normal human values, and duly seek to discern (with the help of the human sciences) whether candidates have the gifts and capacities that are needed, to make our life a viable option.

We note how the richness of the Passionist charism is also lived and valued by lay people who wish to share our experience of it and grow along with us, and who invite us to deepen our charism along with them. They are both a challenge and stimulus to our own ongoing formation within the charism.

4.5 Passion for Life, Passion for the Passionist family

By inviting lay people to take part officially in the capitular work, the 44th General Chapter wanted to highlight their presence and mission within the Passionist family⁷ The flowering of lay Passionist movements suggests a new chapter, rich with hope, in the congregation's story. One of the invited lay participants compared the present flowering of secular movements to a "third founding of the Congregation."

The laity of the Passionist family, in the variety of the Spirit's gifts, live and witness to a passion for life. They are immersed in many kinds of situations and "structures of death", which – with the help of Christ's passion – they try to humanize and redeem, by promoting life.

The lay Passionist communities make the *Memoria Passionis* the centre of their life and activity. Fidelity to the original charism and to prophetic fraternity are achieved in the measure that we make space for others to journey with us, and become a pluralist family, having Christ crucified as the luminous source that draws all to Himself.

⁷ "The congregation continues to see the collaboration of laity as something essential to the life and development of our charism and mission . We are at the beginning of a new experience called forth by the Spirit. It is vital to remain open to the Spirit and deeply share in this experience " (José Agustín: Report on the State of the congregation, p. 11)

As followers of Christ crucified we Passionist religious are aware that religious life at this point in history is at a cross-roads and that we need an attitude of humble, patient search, to discern and re-contextualise those options and practices that were in place in former times.

The charism, like life itself, is a gift for which we are eternally grateful; and one that we may not dispose of as though it were our personal property. Those who wish to stand with us at the foot of the cross, to contemplate the love of God and then proclaim its saving power, can rightly be called “Passionists”, whether they be men, women or children.

“You are not alone”, they said to us at the chapter, “the thousands of lay Passionists whom we represent are in solidarity with you, to keep alive the *Memoria Passionis*”. And they requested us:

1. For guidance in ongoing formation in the Passionist charism of our communities;
2. For opportunities to work with us in Passionist ministries and in the area of social justice;
3. For assistance in offering in a spirit of dialogue criteria for organizing various movements;
4. To be a continual reminder to them of the call to proclaim Christ Crucified, through our prophetic witness and our community life .

4.6 Passion for Solidarity, Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation

“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.

- ❑ We find the impulse for our life and mission in Jesus the Crucified and Risen One who in his person shows God in solidarity with his people.
- ❑ 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. All of us, whether in the older or younger areas of the congregation are at the same time rich and poor, needy yet full of resources.
- ❑ This dynamic understanding of our charism and the knowledge that we are all receivers of God’s gifts calls us to see our life in community and our varied apostolic commitments within a deeper sense of communion, rejoicing together in our diversity.
- ❑ In a world where increasing numbers of poor people are being “crucified” by unjust economic structures, our sense of solidarity calls us to proclaim the Gospel of Justice and Peace, since we see Justice as essential to the Gospel.
- ❑ A proper sense of solidarity also requires us to take a stand alongside those who defend the integrity of creation, for we know that “all creation groans in birth pangs..” (Rm 8,22). It calls us to take and promote a holistic view of life, aware of the interdependence of its many elements, spiritual political social, economic and environmental. We hold a passion for life in all its richness, diversity, plurality and fragility.
- ❑ To come closer to realizing this vision of solidarity, Justice and Peace, and the integrity of creation, we need structures to help us grow in awareness of these issues, and promote fuller communication within the Passionist family.

4.7 Our passion for life requires a reorganization of the Congregation

The capitulars noted the need for an organizational renewal of structures in the Congregation. This would help to bring them into harmony with new realities, with new situations, especially where the Congregation is developing in new ways.

Therefore they dedicated 24 hours to the discernment process for electing the new Superior General. Discernment and election took place within an intense atmosphere of prayer. The same procedure was used before the election of the consultors, to whom the Chapter referred the task of helping the Superior General in the task of animating the congregation, in promoting sharing in the charism and mission, between the various conferences and the laity. The Chapter decided to elect six consultors, not tied exclusively to specific geographic areas but 'citizens of the congregation as a whole'. They should work as a team with the Superior General to promote dialogue, attentive to the emerging needs of various areas, like solidarity, the development of our Vicariates, the involvement of the laity, and issues of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

The Superior General should if he so wished, however, be free to assign to particular consultors the task of liaison with the Conferences.

In line with the above, this procedure for selecting consultors was followed: dialogue between the Superior General and the regional conferences, each of whom should then propose two names; then the Superior General would propose this list to the Chapter, which however retained full freedom of choice.

In practice, for the election of individual consultors, following the suggestion of the new Superior General the geographic areas to which they belonged were mentioned by way of orientation; uniting North Europe and North America under the name of just one consultor. The Superior General & his council were asked to maintain close links with the regional conferences and to study the possibility of joint meetings between the general council and regional conferences.

5. The Chapter Decided

All the decisions of the Chapter have one purpose only: to communicate to the Passionist family a passion for life; this creative desire is not always reducible to juridical statements.

Elections, Guidelines, Decrees and recommendations.

5.1 Election of General Government

The Chapter elected Fr. Ottaviano D'Egidio (PRAES, Italy) as Superior General and 22nd successor to Saint Paul of the Cross

Elected as General Consultors were Frs. Augusto Canali (CALV) from the area of Latin America and the Caribbean; Vital Otshudialokoka (GAB-SALV) from the African regional conference area; Luis Alberto Cano (FAM) from the Iberia area; Robert Joerger (PAUL) from the area of North America and North Europe; Luigi Vaninetti (CORM) from the Italian

conference area; Jefferies Foale (SPIR) from the Asian and Pacific areas. Fr. Luis Alberto Cano was elected as first consultor. The only member of the preceding council is Fr. Jefferies.

5.2 Passionist charism

a) Guidelines

1. Every community, in communion with the Passionist family, we wish to live the next years as a Kairos, as a time of discernment of the Passionist charism. We wish to submit our style of life and our institutions to the purifying and creative breath of the spirit. To do so, we will study our history of the Congregation, the Constitutions, and our traditions, in order to know them and to be able to re-enunciate these with a creative fidelity.

2. We wish to work for a deeper level of communication among communities, among Provinces, Vice-Provinces and Vicariates. We look for the kind of communication that can bring us to share our experiences of passion for life and sustain and enrich the process of charismatic conversion, starting from the multiple cultures of the congregation and the Passionist family.

b) Recommendations:

1. The congregation should promote study at all levels of the Biblical, theological and social meaning of the memoria passionis, and its implications for the Passionist family. The General Council shall study the feasibility of setting up a centre or forum at the level of the congregation for the study of the "memoria passionis".

2. To underline the fact that the basis for our living together is the consecrated life, and to promote the shared value of Passionist vocation within the congregation and the equal dignity of all its members, the Chapter recommends⁸ that the Superior General and his Council promote a reflection at both pastoral and juridical levels, on the vocation of the brother. Further, the Chapter asks that, along with other religious congregations, we renew our request to the Holy See relating to the full participation of our Brothers in the administration of the congregation .

5.3 Apostolate

Recommendations

1. The provinces, conferences and General Council shall make a study of new ways or prototypes of Kerygma, and new ways of offering spiritual direction, to accord with the pastoral needs of the various cultures .

2. They shall also study how to prepare programs of formation of our laity in the apostolic charism of the congregation, so that they may be effective co-workers in bringing the Gospel into various circles, according to their gifts and talents.

⁸ This recommendation was introduced within Fr. José Agustín's report the state of the congregation (p. 37), on the situation of the brothers and the need for greater equality.

5.4 Formation

Recommendations

1. Regional and international meetings shall be held for formation personnel and vocation promoters, where that they can pool their experience and develop formation methods which, while appropriate for the diverse areas of the Congregation, also give expression to the basic values of our charism .
2. Specific preparation of our formation personnel for their ministry must be provided.
3. The provinces and the various cultural areas should prepare materials and instructional guides about the charism both for our religious and laity.
4. The possibility of creating regional and international student communities shall be studied
5. We need to share projects of guidance for our young religious in their first years after perpetual profession and after ordination, to cater for their fuller cultural development, and provide material upon the *memoria passionis*.
6. The congregation is invited to study new ways to incorporate the laity within the work of Passionist formation, as well as welcoming their contribution to the knowledge and sharing of the Passionist charism.

5.5 Solidarity; Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation

Decrees

- 1. The Chapter decrees that an Office for Solidarity and Mission be established, of which the Secretary General for the missions is a part.**

This office for solidarity and mission will have the following tasks:

- Education and formation of ourselves and of our partners in mission, on ways of thinking and acting in solidarity. For this purpose, the office should be in communication with the whole congregation, facilitating the sharing of information and dialog, using the available modern technologies
 - Furnishing the necessary means for the Congregation to fulfil its call to solidarity through activities such as:
 - Monitoring the needs that exist within the congregation and in our mission abroad.
 - Preparation and publication of theological cultural and sociological material that will help us to understand inculturation, the impact of globalisation etc
 - Provision of material for courses and programs of updating, for our ongoing formation
 - Promote an effective dialogue at the level of the whole congregation about the initiatives already in action.
- 2. The Chapter decrees that a Fund for “Solidarity and Mission” be set up, to help the needy areas of the congregation and financially aid with projects of solidarity with the "crucified"**

The modes of financing this Fund are: returns from investments, fund-raising, helps from foundations and charitable organizations, contributions from the provinces and vice-provinces. Both the Solidarity Office and the Solidarity and Mission Fund shall be transparent and responsible in their mode of operation.

Recommendations

The Chapter supports the request, made by the Province of St. Paul of the Cross (U.S.A.) to enrol the Congregation with the status of a non-governmental organization (NGO) at the United Nations (UN)

In this regard the Chapter recommends :

1. That the Passionist representative at the UN in New York be chosen in a process to be determined by the Superior General and his council
2. That the Superior General and council delegate a religious to take part in the meetings of the promoters of Justice and Peace at the Union of Superiors General in Rome

The work of these two representatives will be closely integrated with the working of the office for Solidarity and Mission .

The Superior General and his Council will set up areas of responsibility, guidelines for involvement, accounting and for the distribution of funds, and for a process of accountability for the Office and the “Solidarity and Mission” Fund, and the two representatives at the UN and in Rome. A report of what has been done will be made at the next Synod in 2002.

5.6 Collaboration with the laity involved with the Passionist charism

Recommendations

The Chapter believes it should not decide upon forms and structures relating to the life and mission of the laity. Rather, it invites our members to collaborate with them, open to the Spirit of God who inspires all with creative fidelity to our Passionist charism.

In response to the appeal made by laity present at this Chapter made in the name of “*thousands of lay people joined with us in keeping alive the memory of the passion*”, we Passionists present at the 44th General Chapter recommend:

1. that the congregation promote and re-affirm the lay Passionist movements where they already exist and encourage their creation where they have not yet begun
2. that the Provinces, Vice-provinces and Vicariates should continue to research with humility and patience the best way of working with the lay movements
3. that the Provinces, Vice-provinces and Vicariates who so desire should experiment with new forms of interaction with the laity, and communicate their results with the rest of the congregation and with lay Passionist groups, for example
 - part-time sharing in our life of fraternity
 - promote centres of formation and reflection on our Passionist charism
 - create a council of laity at the level of province or local community to maintain a live dialogue on Passionist charism
4. that the Superior General and his council work out criteria to guide our response to the requests for approval, at provincial and general level, of the statutes of lay groups wishing to be aggregated to our Institute.

5.7 Government and Reorganization of the Congregation

a) Decrees

1. At the request of the respective vice-provinces, the Chapter unanimously decreed the elevation to the status of Province of the Vice-provinces of the Passion of Christ (Philippines) and of Our Lady of Fatima (Portugal and Angola)
2. The General Econome will present to the Synod or General Chapter the accounts for the two years up to that Synod or Chapter. When the accounts have been approved by the Chapter or Synod, the contributions from the Provinces will cover whatever deficit may exist in the ordinary revenues of the Generalate. Each province will contribute according to the number of religious, with the same percentage as that calculated for the whole province on a GDP basis linked with the Purchasing Power Parity of the country in which the religious live, on the 1st Sept of the year in which the chapter or synod is held.

b) Recommendations

1. The Superior General and his Council, in dialog with the provinces and vicariates, shall study and begin to implement a new strategy regarding the rights, structures, status and representation of those Vicariates especially that have reached a stage of development that would merit juridical autonomy, with a sufficient economic base.
2. The Chapter recommends that, for the General Synod of 2002, the general commission for economy will prepare a plan for the restructuring of the Generalate building, based on an outline presented by the General and his council, helped by the general Econome. The outline will indicate the needs of the General Curia, the studentate, the community, etc., in relation to the internal organization of the building. On the basis of this study, a program of extraordinary works will be drawn up, to include the external structure of the buildings, the renewal of various aspects of the Curia building, installation of bathroom facilities etc., to complete the improvements begun some years ago.

To finance this study and provide finance for the work of reconstruction, and to provide for other emergency repairs that may be required, the Chapter approves a special contribution in the order of a 50% increase in the level of present contributions by the provinces, at least for the next two years.

Conclusion

The Chapter ended with a Eucharistic celebration, presided over by the new Superior General, in Portuguese in honour of our host country and in a sign of gratitude for the outstanding hospitality of our Brazilian confreres. Fittingly, it was on the feast of the exaltation of the Holy Cross.

Alongside the altar was the model of Jacob's well. Before the liturgy of the Word, all were given water to drink, from the well – in clear reference to Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman: "whoever drinks of the water that I give will never thirst again" (Jn 4,14). It expressed the wish that the reflexions and decisions of the Chapter should become for the Congregation a source of new life.

At the end of the Eucharist, the capitulars sang the "Salve Regina", entrusting our passion for life to the mother of Jesus the author of life. Finally, we sang the "Salve sancte Pater" to again call on the help of the Founder of the Congregation; and the assembly concluded with a cordial embrace of peace.

Appendix: Reconfirmation of Decrees and Recommendations of previous General Chapters

1. That the Regional Vicar of a General Vicariate be equal to Vice Provincials regarding participation in the General Chapter and the General Synod, namely, that he be a member de jure of the above-mentioned assemblies of the Congregation.
2. Religious attached to another Province indefinitely or for five years have active and passive voice in that Province and not in their own when elections take place for delegates to the Provincial and General Chapter or other Provincial Assemblies.
3. Regarding the celebration of the Mass and the suffrages for the entire Congregation (*replacing Numbers 18 and 20 of the General Regulations*), the Chapter declares:
 - 3.1. In every local community with at least three religious:
 - a) One Mass will be offered, if possible, the community Mass, at the death of the Supreme Pontiff, the Superior General or an ex-Superior General.
 - b) One Mass will be offered every month:
 1. For all our religious, for Passionist Nuns and Sisters who have died during the previous month;
 2. For all deceased Passionists
 3. For all deceased parents and benefactors
 4. For all living parents and benefactors.
 - c) In the month of November, other than the Masses mentioned above, three additional Masses will be offered:
 1. For all deceased Passionists
 2. For all deceased parents
 3. For all deceased benefactors.
 - 3.2. For religious of the same Province, for their parents, and for benefactors, Provincial Authority determines those suffrages it deems opportune.
4. The financial administration and accountability of each community, each Province and the Congregation's central administration, will reflect the Chapter's insistence on a co-responsible approach to all aspects of Passionist life.

Financial responsibility is an opportunity for making the Gospel link between theory and practice and of verifying our continual conversion which also requires outward expression. (cfr. Const. 56, 58).

- 4.1. The Chapter decrees that the **annual financial reports** of each Province, Vice Province and Regional Vicariate be sent to the Econome General **by June of the following year**. This report shall include the income and expenses, investments and savings, loans and debts, and any other information that is necessary to understand the financial situation.
- 4.2. The Chapter decrees that a **Finance Commission** of competent Passionists and appropriate lay professionals be established to advice the General Superior and Council. The task of this Finance Commission are the following:
 1. Assist the Econome General in preparing the annual budget.
 2. Review the General System of accounting and reporting.
 3. Review the performance of the investment portfolio.
 4. Prepare a financial plan for the extraordinary maintenance of the Generalate.
 5. Suggest prudent norms that guarantee the security of financial funds.
 6. Take up any other concerns or issues deemed appropriate by the Superior General.

The Finance Commission will report to the next Synods and to the General Chapter.

5. The Formation Fund for Passionist Religious, established by the Superior General at the suggestion of the General Synod, is hereby recognized by the General Chapter. The following norms regulate its use:
 - A. The principal or capital in the Formation Fund may never be used. If some extraordinary necessity would seem to suggest using this permanent capita, the Superior General must have the consent of his council and the approval of the General Synod of the Congregation by a two-thirds vote.
 - B. The Superior General shall continue efforts to develop this Formation Fund until the annual interest is sufficient to provide for formation in those parts of the Congregation in greatest need.
 - C. Interest from the Formation Fund will be used only for the initial formation of Passionist postulants, novices and professed religious. It may not be used to help support minor seminaries. Expenses of formation are to be understood in a broad sense as covering all ordinary expenses associated with room, board and studies.
 - D. Extraordinary expenses for formation are excluded from the purposes of the Formation Fund. Excluded, therefore, are all purchases of land, construction, restoration of buildings and other capital improvements.
 - E. The capital will be placed only in investments which are rated in the highest grade of security by internationally recognized ratings. Such investments are typically securities of an economically stable government or securities guaranteed by an economically stable government. All such investments will be in full conformity with the principles of social justice.
 - F. The Superior General with his Council will study the requests received each year and, after having heard the opinion of the Finance Council, decide on the apportionment of the interest to be given to needy parts of the Congregation. Parts of the Congregation which are still developing, especially in the Third World countries, should receive preferential consideration.

- G. Except in very unusual circumstances, no jurisdiction of the Congregation should receive more than one-fifth of the interest in a given year.
 - H. The amounts given or foreseen should be included in the annual audit and budget. Likewise a report will be given to the General Synod and General Chapter.
6. The General Chapter declares that the title Passionist "Fathers" may not be used to describe or designate our Congregation. This declaration prohibits the use of this title on stationery, publications, publicity, telephone books, signs before our houses and in any other manner, including, if possible, legal documents. The Chapter also urges the religious to avoid using this description.
 7. The Chapter declares that only those houses are Inter-Provincial (Reg. 102,2) which have been declared so by the Superior General with the consent of his Council after having heard the Provincials involved. Such houses are governed by norms approved by the Superior General with the consent of his Council.
 8. Only a General Chapter may grant an exchange of suffrages with other Institutes.
 9. The President of a Chapter or Regional Congress can, with the consent of the Chapter or Regional Congress, withdraw the right of participation in the Chapter when a religious has missed one-third of the work of the Chapter.
 10. The Chapter declares that only the Major Superior may permit a religious to maintain a personal bank account because of some particular need. The funds of the account must always belong to the Congregation and bear the signature of at least two religious in an either/or capacity. The religious is to give an annual accounting of all deposits and withdrawals to the Major Superior or his delegate.
 11. The forty-day retreat of Saint Paul of the Cross at Castellazzo can be a special type of spiritual retreat for our religious. The General Chapter recommends this experience to our religious. The Memory of the Crucified along with solitude, prayer and penance should be fundamental elements of this experience.