



CONGREGATION OF THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST
47th GENERAL CHAPTER
Rome, 6-27 October 2018

REPORT OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

INTRODUCTION

I want to begin this report with an **expression of gratitude** to all my brothers and sisters in the Congregation for your confidence and trust, not only in calling me to serve the Congregation as Superior General six years ago, but in truly supporting me in my ministry over these years. I can sincerely say that I have never felt abandoned to the task and left to do my work without your interest and concern for my welfare. I have genuinely felt your fraternal support in the best interest of our Congregation and, at the outset, I want to say **THANK YOU!**

Six years ago, I was shocked to be asked by you to lead our beloved Congregation. It was such a surprise and so unexpected that I was not sure where to begin or what to do. The immensity of the task left me in a daze! However, I accepted my call as coming from God through you, my brothers, and with your support and the help of those who worked closely with me in the Curia, I grew in confidence both in my role and in myself as a person in carrying out my ministry. I can truly say that it has been a privilege for me to serve the Congregation in this role for the past six years. I have always felt proud to represent our beloved Congregation on your behalf.

I now **welcome** you as we gather here in SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Rome representing our brothers and sisters throughout the Congregation at this 47th General Chapter. As Capitulars, we have an awesome responsibility to fulfil. As our Constitutions reminds us:

“The General Chapter is the supreme authority in the Congregation, and possesses full jurisdiction according to the norms of law.

The General Chapter meets to carry out its task of making laws and holding elections. It has to promote the faithfulness of the Congregation to the ideals of community and service of the Church.” (Const. 126, 127)

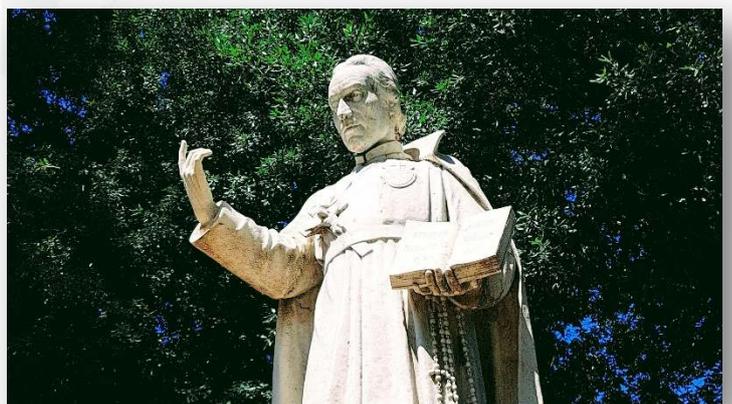
Focus on the Charismatic Testimony of the Passionist Mission

The theme chosen for this 47th General Chapter is: ***Renewing our Mission: Gratitude, Prophecy, Hope***. This theme is one that we want to keep before our focus, not only during this Chapter, but also in light of the third centenary of the foundation of our Congregation in 2020 which is to be launched during the General Chapter.

I take this opportunity to sincerely thank Fr Christopher Monaghan (SPIR) for his thoughtful, inspiring and challenging opening presentation on the Chapter theme yesterday. Let us not cast aside what we have been given and heard, but allow the thoughts and challenges presented to us by Fr Christopher to ruminate in our minds and hearts and influence our reflection, discussion and contribution during this Chapter.

For the past 18 years the Congregation has been very much engaged with the process of Congregational restructuring. Whilst this process had as its aim the revitalisation of our mission, much of our energy and preoccupation has in fact been expended with struggling to understand and implement the new vision and way-of-being demanded from the process - which was to institutionalise **structures of solidarity in Configurations** in order to encourage collaboration in a new way for giving greater strength for our life and mission. The fear and some resistance effected by the new change in many respects kept us focused inward on our internal structures, rather than looking outward and finding effective ways to collaborate and join forces in a wider context for revitalising and implementing the Congregation's specific mission. Having said that, I also acknowledge the many bold collaborative initiatives which have emerged and continue to do so.

It is time now for us to **focus on the charismatic testimony of our mission** – the reason for our existence as a Congregation. As a support to this direction, we are living in a time of the Church's history, especially under Pope Francis' leadership, when a strong emphasis on **evangelisation** and **mission** is encouraged: *proclaiming the joy of the Gospel to the poor and going out on mission to the peripheries and margins*.



We must remember that as a Congregation we exist in the Church, not just for our own edification, or our glorification, or for our profit, but for a very specific and meaningful purpose. As is stated clearly in our Constitutions:

“...the Church with her supreme authority approved our Congregation and its Rule, and entrusted us with a mission: to preach the Gospel of the Passion by our life and apostolate.” (Const. 2)

Further, we are reminded that:

“We come together therefore in apostolic communities so that we can fulfil this mission of ours...” (Const. 2)

So, **our mission** is integrally connected with **our life** in community. Our **community life** and our **mission** cannot be separated; they are two sides of the one coin. Our life is our mission (by witness), and our mission is our life (by action). Together, they both shape us and give us our identity and authenticity as Passionists. **Who we are** and **what we do** are interconnected and interrelated. *“Our involvement in the apostolate flows directly from our life in community.” (Const. 67)*

Thus, I believe, when we speak about **“Renewing our Mission”**, it is primarily about **“renewing ourselves”**. The ‘mission’ is given; it is clear. However, because our mission flows from ‘who we are’, we must be constantly open to **self-renewal** – which is our response and openness to what God is doing in us for the coming of God’s kingdom. It is the **ongoing call to conversion and repentance** in the mission of the kingdom of God. The renewal of the mission is a natural consequence of the renewal of the missionaries.

In my experience of visiting around the Congregation, I can confidently say that everywhere our religious are working hard and doing good work. However, I sometimes see that there is a disconnect between our life and work. In some situations, we have religious living together, or rather, boarding together, in a house from which they go out to work. It is as if they are workers for a corporation or organisation. While It is true that as human beings we need to be involved in doing meaningful and satisfying work, as Passionist religious, we are also to cultivate a meaningful life together in witnessing to Jesus and his way by ‘who we are’.

“Saint Paul of the Cross gathered companions to live together and to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to all.” (Const. 1)

‘Mission’ is not a job to be done or a task to be accomplished. Rather, in the Scriptures, what is stressed in ‘mission’ is the close personal union – a relationship of communion - between the **person sending (Christ)** and the **person sent (me)**. What is important and what constitutes the mission is the personal union and the transparency, so that the person sending becomes present in the one sent. Our mission is about ‘who we are’... Christ’s messengers.

Mission is always a call beyond professionalism. Our mission must be rooted in God. It becomes fruitful in the degree that God comes through. This is the wisdom of the Biblical concept of mission. When we look at Jesus, we see that his real strength was not his professionalism, but the fact that God shone through. His oneness with the Father was his ultimate secret.

Mission is Jesus’ initiative and requires from us that we fit ourselves into the work of salvation which he accomplishes through us. He does not necessarily send us where we experience the greatest satisfaction, where we show to the best advantage, or where we unfold our talents best. The mission he entrusts to us may in fact be quite unattractive. But we can be assured that it will bring us peace and freedom.

‘Who we are’ (our being/life) and ‘what we do’ (our doing/mission) are interrelated; they are two sides of the one coin and cannot be separated. Each flow from and influences the other. We are not called to be **‘working for God’**, but rather we are to **‘do God’s work’** – a subtle but important distinction made by Fr Thomas Green SJ in his book: *Darkness in the Marketplace*. The first phrase reminds us of a professional person who refuses long-term commitments, decides independently which work to take on, and then offers the end product to the highest bidder. Here, the end product/result is offered to God whether God accepts it or not. In the second phrase, however, the decision of what to do is with God who can freely dispose of the person sent. It is God’s work from the very beginning.

We must not forget that we have chosen to follow Jesus in the **‘consecrated life’**, albeit in the world of today and within the Passionist Congregation with its specific charism: *to keep alive the memory of the Passion of Jesus as a sign of God’s love and to promote that memory in the lives of the people*. The consecrated life has its demands. It is a vocation

in the Church with a specific lifestyle in imitation of Jesus: poor, chaste and obedient. The religious vows (evangelical counsels) of poverty, chastity and obedience which we profess cannot be just ‘requirements’ or ‘burdens’ which one must bear in order to be part of a religious community. Rather, they must form us in the image of and in relationship with Jesus and must influence the manner in which we witness and respond in the world. As our Constitutions says:

“We leave all things to follow Christ in the spirit of the Gospel beatitudes.

In the midst of the people of God we constantly endeavour to live out our commitment to poverty, chastity and obedience as religious in community. Observing these evangelical counsels, both individually and as a community, enables us to contact Christ at a deep level of His Paschal Mystery.

If the message of the Cross has not first penetrated our own lives, we ought not presume to proclaim it to others.”
(Const. 9)

My hope, therefore, is that this General Chapter will commit us to a journey and process of reflection in the **‘renewal of our mission’**, which necessarily implies the **‘renewal of ourselves’**. We want to distinguish *what God wants us to do* from *what we ourselves want to do for God*. It is not enough that we serve God according to our own liking and, in fact, do our own thing. Rather, God must be able to dispose of us entirely and freely.

This calls us, individually and communally, to **God’s challenging but renewing grace of ongoing conversion** which comes from a daily listening, prayerful discernment, and total surrender to God’s will. This necessarily means living a lifestyle that is God-centred and built upon the values of the kingdom beatitudes as Jesus himself lived and proclaimed. In particular, for us Passionists, it means deepening our relationship with Jesus Crucified by which we are formed to reflect and witness the values of justice, mercy, compassion and love in our mission with all those who are ‘crucified’ and suffering today.

However, I must confess that in some parts of our Congregation/communities there seems to be no interest or effort made in promoting our Passionist religious life. It almost seems like it is a burden to welcome new potential members, or that we ourselves don't believe in the beauty, meaning and power of the Passionist charism anymore. We sometimes give the impression that religious life is not worth it – after all, our members are aged and have nothing to offer to young people, or we convey a sense of resignation, tiredness, unhappiness and discontent. This sort of attitude naturally discourages young people to consider committing their life to Jesus in this lifestyle which does not seem to be life-giving to those who have supposedly embraced it. Pope Francis warned that this feeling of resignation corrodes our spirit and can lead to the spiritual sin ('disease') of *acedia* which essentially leads us into despair, indifference and apathy with regard to our faith and vocation.

In any case, if we welcome new vocations, it is critical that there be good discernment and proper care taken in the selection of candidates. We must guard against the temptation of accepting candidates simply to boost our numbers, but, rather, we must be aware of and make every effort to understand the candidate's right motivation, especially in less developed societies where entering a religious formation program can be an opportunity for higher education, an elevated status and a better lifestyle.

In addition, we must also be attuned to the deficiencies prevalent in our societies today with regard to a depleted faith education and practice, mental health issues, psychological balance, culture of sexual morality and maturity, visions of ecclesiology, individualism, clericalism etc. We are not in the business of recruiting workers for the organisation; rather, we must be strict and prudent in our discernment to foster and encourage young people who have a genuine relationship with Jesus, are reflective, self-assured, open, compassionate and potential reconcilers and community-builders in the mission of Jesus.

3. Departures from the Congregation

The number of departures from the Congregation has been a great cause of concern for the General Council. Some of these departures have been requests for laicization. However, of greater concern in some ways are those who request time for vocational discernment,

exclaustration and incardination into a diocese – sometimes a very short time after their initial formation period.

The reasons for these departures are many and varied: crisis of faith and vocation; celibacy issues; sexual abuse of minors; discontentment and disagreement with the changes in the Congregation; individualism and the inability to live community life; issues of unresolved relationship difficulties with confreres; irreconciled differences; isolation and unacceptance; difficulty and disagreement with authority or decisions; lack of meaningful ministry; seeking a better and more autonomous lifestyle, especially as a priest within the diocesan/parish structure.

These are issues which must be given serious attention, identified and resolved during the time of initial formation. Any doubt when tackling these issues must always be in favour of the Congregation's community life and mission. One gets the impression sometimes that much attention during the formation process is focused on academic requirements and on ministry directed for the ordained priesthood, with not enough care given for the formation of our religious life in Passionist community and mission.

Superiors must be more attentive and show greater pastoral care and concern to religious who are troubled or are in vulnerable situations. They must not quickly suggest options of absence from the community which can convey a feeling of disinterest or getting rid of a problem. On the contrary, building a relationship of trust, listening, open dialogue and the offer of professional help is what needs to be cultivated in assisting our religious who may be experiencing difficulties and crisis.

4. Community Life

This is an area of our life that continues to pose many challenges. Partly the difficulty lies in our understanding (or mis-understanding) of the nature and purpose of the community dimension of religious life from which flows our expectations of community life.

Our Constitutions #25 states that: *“Our Passionist vocation is a call to live the fullness of Christian love in an evangelical community.”* It is clear that our community life is our first apostolate and must be inspired by, give witness to and reflect the values of the Gospel. However, in many instances, this is far from the reality. In fact, often our

community life is about bodies in a dwelling and we fail to give sufficient attention to the purpose and meaning of our living together.

Our Constitutions reminds us that: *“Saint Paul of the Cross gathered companions **to live together and to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to all.**”* We do not live under the same roof as lone individuals in order to do our own thing, or to promote our own ideas, or to follow our own dreams. Rather, we are to **live together** with all that entails. This involves building and cultivating sincere fraternal relationships with the others, including those with different opinions and who see things differently to me. Living together and growing in relationships demand sacrifice, tolerance, patience, understanding, forgiveness and reconciliation. And then, we are to **proclaim the Gospel of Christ** which is about developing our relationship with God (Christ), demanding prayer, reflection, spiritual reading, study, and ministries in service to others.

There are many houses in which the religious rarely meet to discuss and make plans about our life and mission in that place. Why are we here? What are we doing? Are we responding charismatically and in a relevant manner to the real needs of the area where we are in mission? Or do we just keep on doing what we always have done? (*Note the inter-relationship between our community life and mission.*) We need to be reminded that: *“the Local Community has the freedom it needs to develop its life and mission in its own area in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.”* (Const. 121)

What is the witness-value of a life in common? What is it that we are witnessing to? Why a common life in any case? Can I be a Passionist and live alone? These are questions which we must tackle together. In fact, there are some Passionists living alone who perhaps offer a more genuine witness of the Gospel values and the evangelical counsels. So, why call them back into a community where there is a contrary witness and where they find no nourishment? I am not proposing the solitary life for Passionists, but merely challenging us about our community life. As we know, this is often the case also for young men in formation who move out from the structured community/fraternal life of the formation house to another house where everything they were instructed to be important values are de-constructed, leaving them confused, disillusioned and question the meaning of their vocation.

There is no doubt today that we come from the experience of a world where we are influenced by and tempted towards individualism and

self-seeking tendencies. This is contrary to our chosen vocation and it places great challenges on our profession to live by the evangelical counsels: poverty, chastity and obedience – the essence of which is about considering others, self-giving, sacrifice, simplicity of lifestyle, sharing, availability for service, hospitality and the call to inclusive love. Naturally, these values do not cater for our comfort and ease, but they do draw and allow us to live by our consecration and give witness to the Cross and Passion of Jesus. In this way the vows are not just juridical requirements which is measured by whether we keep them or break them. Rather, the vows are **evangelical counsels (Gospel imperatives)** which lays before us a pathway that makes us **free to love**.

Naturally, community life does not exist without persons – wherein lies great challenges. There are difficulties we face of living with individuals who are different to me and with whom I did not choose to live. This is further compounded today in our Congregation by the challenge of diversity and the fear of difference as a result of our ‘internationality’: multi-ethnic and multi-cultural living. We must make efforts here to understand, accept and tolerate others and guard against judgements, prejudice and distancing. Rather than find ways to opt-out or not get involved, it is important to work through these challenges, strive for unity, and recognise the possibilities for richness and blessings because of diversity.

Other challenges in community life which we find difficult to address and so choose to live with are: personal conflicts and past unreconciled hurts among one another. This is very real in many communities, but which are not addressed, either because we find it too confrontational or we don’t know how to tackle the issues. Meanwhile, these conflictive areas have a toxic effect on the life of the community and creates a distance, rather than a **communion of persons**. When these difficulties are not faced, instead of giving witness of a Christian community, a contrary witness is generated creating an environment that is painful, joyless and hypocritical – even leading some members to either become sarcastic and negative, or opting out altogether, i.e. leaving or requesting exclaustation. Conflict-resolution and working for reconciliation is a real challenge and need in many parts of the Congregation, but in fact with the least attention and time devoted to it. It is easier to pretend “all is fine” and continue living in destructive environments than work for reconciliation, renewal and change.

It is worth listening to this advice from Pope Francis about the fraternal life in community:

“This must be nurtured through prayer in the community, prayerful reading of the Word, active participation in the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation, fraternal dialogue and sincere communication between all members, fraternal correction, mercy towards the brother or sister who sins, and the sharing of responsibilities. All this must be accompanied by an eloquent and joyful witness of simple life alongside the poor and by a mission that favours the existential peripheries. The renewal of fraternal life is essential for the result of vocational pastoral care, being able to say “Come and you will see” (cf. John, 1:39), and for the perseverance of brothers and sisters, both young and less young. Because, when a brother or a sister does not find support for consecrated life within the community, he or she will seek it elsewhere, with all that this entails.”

I would like to emphasise here two points from our Constitutions which I believe needs greater reflection and action:

- a) *“The Local Community is the living cell on which depends the vitality of the entire Congregation.”* (Const. 119) This is an awesome responsibility which every local community needs to consider and assume. The responsibility pertains to each and every member of the community: *“Each individual member has the right and duty to take part in all the steps involved in making decisions; his role should never be one of merely passive acquiescence.”*
- b) The critical role and figure of the (Local) Superior who is to be: encouraging, inviting the involvement and contribution of the members, listening, servant, guide, respectful of every member, kind and considerate, gentle, firm, consistent, pastor, animator (cf. Const. 119, 120). This role needs serious attention and formation – especially in the newer and younger parts of the Congregation. It is important that Superiors not view their role as managers of a company but work to create a sense of brotherhood and fraternity in community united in a common life and mission. As Pope Francis

said: *“The fraternal community has enormous power to call people together. The illnesses of the community, on the other hand, have power that destroys.”*

I propose that this Chapter consider the issues of **Community Life** and the **Service of Authority** as priorities to address.

5. Mission and Ministry

The religious of the Congregation world-wide are involved in many varied and diverse ministries, though in most parts of the Congregation we seem to favour and are engaged in parish-based ministries within dioceses. There is always the preoccupation and debate with whether the Congregation should accept parishes. However, in my estimation what is important is that we not lose sight of our specific identity as Passionists, and our specific mission in the Church: *“to preach the Gospel of the Passion by our life and apostolate.”* (Const. 2) No matter what type of apostolate we are engaged with (not of our own choosing, but within the plan of the province/community), we must always keep before our focus the specific aspect of Christ’s life and person which is related to his Passion, Death and Resurrection.

It goes without saying that, for this to happen, we must, firstly, cultivate a living relationship with Christ Crucified ... *“We Passionists make the Paschal Mystery the centre of our lives...(which) entails a loving commitment to follow Jesus Crucified, and a generous resolve to proclaim His Passion and death with faith and love.”* (Const. 65)

Secondly, we must be ever attentive to both people and our earth/environment today *“crucified’ as they are by injustice, by the lack of a deep respect for human life, and by a hungry yearning for peace, truth, and the fullness of human existence.”* (Const. 65)

Perhaps in the vision of Pope Francis today, we need to **renew our mission** in a practical method of evangelisation *“...to go to the peripheries, not only geographically, but also the existential peripheries: the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all misery....Other than this, we also try to reach out to people who are far away, via digital means, the web and brief messaging.”*

While I have personally experienced the great esteem, respect and love that the people have for our Passionist religious wherever they

serve, we must guard against becoming possessive, exclusive and tied to the same people and places. “Renewing our mission” implies our availability for the needs of the Congregation’s mission wherever it is needed.

Also, at the time of Chapters and Configuration Assemblies, we need to review and discern the prophetic call as to where we are being summoned by the Spirit and be ready to respond for the sake of fidelity to the mission of our Congregation. The mission is not about us Passionists, but about communicating the act of God’s love seen and experienced in the Passion of Jesus. We must believe in and desire to carry out this mission wherever it is needed and welcomed.

I want to express my concern, however, that we not just be ‘workers for God or for the people’. Rather, in the hope of fruitfulness, we must make greater efforts to preserve and find a good balance between our ministry and community life which, as I proposed earlier, are intertwined. Constitutions #67 makes it very clear: *“Our involvement in the apostolate flows directly from our life in community. Since we have been called to serve the Church in and through community, we should have special concern for those forms of the apostolate that are enriched by, and in turn nourish, community life.”*

Unfortunately, there exist some houses in the Congregation where the religious are so busy and engaged with the apostolate, that there is difficulty finding a supportive religious and fraternal life, thus creating an environment of loneliness, distance, spiritual dryness and meaninglessness. In some of these situations, even common prayer is abandoned due to choices made in favour of service to the people...” Doing God’s work?” Naturally, we must not neglect to serve and attend to the demands of our people. However, we must also not neglect our own spiritual and physical nourishment and health in order that we carry out our mission in accordance with the desire of God and serve the people from a depth of what we have received from God.

Having said this, I take this opportunity to recognise and thank so many of our religious who live our charism by standing with and offering support to their people who are experiencing various forms of suffering and difficulties. In particular, I acknowledge our men in Venezuela, Ukraine, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Peru, Cuba, Vietnam, China, El Salvador, Honduras, Haiti and other parts where they live with insecurity, violence, serious economic crisis and lack of freedom. Of course, more recently we remember the devastating

destruction caused as a result of natural disasters (storms, floods, earthquakes) in Puerto Rico, India and Japan. The Passion of Christ continues today, and so:

“...we share in the joys and sorrows of our contemporaries as we journey through life toward the Father. We wish to share in the distress of all, especially those who are poor and neglected; we seek to offer them comfort and to relieve the burden of their sorrow.” (Const. 3)

6. Formation

Formation for our life (initial and ongoing) remains, perhaps, the most critical area deserving, and receiving, much attention. The creation of an Office for Formation, approved by the last General Chapter, has helped to give greater attention and assistance to this important area. Fr Martin Coffey (PATR) was appointed the Secretary for Formation and, together with a team representing the six Configurations, they have been working to revise the General Formation Plan and encourage every entity to draw up its own formation plan. They have also taken initiatives to organise a successful Congregational course for formators in Rome (October 2016) and have participated in meetings/seminars on the Configuration/local levels.

A report from the Secretary for Formation regarding what has been achieved and future plans and proposals will be provided during this Chapter.

Some concerns, however, in the area of formation needing attention are that:

- Priority to be given for the training and formation of formators. While formators can surely benefit from doing academic courses in spirituality, theology, psychology etc., it is of vital importance that the formator firstly undertake an intensive program in greater knowledge and understanding of himself, so that he can better understand and assist those he will be accompanying in the formation process. Training in Spiritual Direction and Clinical Pastoral Education are recommended;
- Entities and Configurations have in place a succession plan for formators. Suitable religious need to be identified and trained;

- Formation emphasise the consecrated life, the charismatic and missionary life of the Congregation, and not just rely on the requirements for the ordained ministerial priesthood;
- Formation not happen in a vacuum (going through the course requirements), devoid of any connection with the reality of life today – in the world, in the Church, and in the Congregation/communities. Encourage students/religious with opportunities to test their vocation and to experience mission and community life in other challenging contexts and cultures;
- We aim to form evangelising missionaries according to discerned needs in the Congregation, the Church and the world of today – and not just ‘workers’ or priests to fill positions;
- Continuous or ongoing formation at all levels be structured and resourced, especially for personal and spiritual renewal and not just academic studies. This must also include identifying and qualifying selected religious who would work within the internal structures/ministries of the Congregation.

7. Configurations

The six Configurations which resulted from the process of Congregational Restructuring and confirmed at the last General Chapter continues to be a great preoccupation. There are those who are excited about the prospects and possibilities of this new way of being and collaborating within structures of solidarity, while there are others who have remained resistant and uncooperative. I suspect that the reasons are because of not having a proper understanding of this vision, and also the closedness resulting from the inevitable fear of uncertainty which comes from any newness and change.

I wish to point out, however, that the traditional governance structures of Province/Vice Province/Vicariate with which we are most familiar continue as in the past and have not changed – even if some Provinces chose to merge into larger entities. The pros or cons of this choice, or any other way, continues to, and must be, evaluated. Based on tried and lived experience: what can be improved? what needs to change or be modified? what is the way forward? The process of adaptation as a result of **continuing prayerful discernment** must always guide our religious life.

New times require new responses: “*new wine in new wineskins*” (Mk. 2:18-22). The Congregation cannot live its life and mission ‘frozen’ in the 18th century! If it does, then it is doomed to staleness and irrelevancy. The gift of the charism remains the life-giving force of the Spirit – **but for today, for new times**. It is true that it is much easier to hark back to the past and what we are familiar with (“the fleshpots of Egypt”), even if it kept us as slaves (imprisoned, controlled and unfree), rather than to journey through the hardships of the wilderness with the freedom to create a life-giving path for a meaningful present and future (“the Promised Land”?). The key, however, for us as a Congregation, is that the journey must be traversed **together** with trust in God who leads and feeds us in our struggle and discernment.

Up until now, in order to support and revitalise the mission in those areas of the Congregation experiencing decline or difficulty in personnel, finance or formation (3 critical areas for life), the Congregation discerned collaboration in **solidarity** as an important way of being for the future. Thus, “*the Configurations are principally organised to promote dialogue and cooperation between the different parts of the Congregation, and to foster initiatives and common action for the life and mission of the Congregation.*” (46th General Chapter Document)

Obviously, we believe that every place and situation where the Congregation is present is meaningful in terms of our call to witness our charism and mission. However, in the situation being faced by the Congregation today (spread around 62 countries, cultures and contexts), we cannot just adopt the attitude of “keep on, keeping on”. On the contrary, we ought to make informed decisions and exercise wise choices (prayerful discernment) for the effective viability and sustainability of our 362 presences, and where we must channel our limited energies and resources. For this, we need to develop a vision and heart for the whole Congregation in its **internationality**. There is only **one** Congregation with its unique spirituality and mission, expressed and lived in **many** different places, cultures, languages and contexts. The **‘many’** are **parts** of the **one whole** which, in turn, is dependent on the **many parts**. The Configurations, individually and in relationship with others, are established as structures to promote **solidarity** – sharing of resources, joining forces, making decisions – **for life and for mission** where we currently are and where we discern we must be.

All the Configurations (in its two models, either as an aggregation of several autonomous juridical entities, or as a single juridical entity) within its solidarity structures and commissions have been active in dialogue and collaboration – even if meeting some resistances – and there have been many good, bold and meaningful initiatives undertaken. I encourage that this continue and that we move forward with courage and trust to focus on the witness of our fraternal community life and our specific mission of evangelisation through the Word of the Cross as priorities.

The opportunity for us to evaluate and dialogue about the Configurations is scheduled during the Chapter following the reports given by the Configuration Presidents concerning their role in the Extended Council, initiatives taken, challenges and resistances faced and possible suggestions.

8. Finance

A Finance Report will be presented to the General Chapter by the General Econome.

However, I would like to underline two areas of our responsibility towards the General Administration concerning finance which requires serious attention:

- i. The **Annual Financial Report** of each entity which is to be sent to the General Econome has been lacking, even ignored, by some. This is not an option, but a responsibility which must be adhered to. It is difficult to ascertain the real situation or finance needs of the entities in the Congregation if it is not reported in a transparent manner. Sometimes the problem lies in the lack of competency and confidence of the religious appointed to the task as Econome. A further problem comes from the failure of the Local Economes to give an accounting to the Province/Vice Province Econome who, then, is unable to complete and send an accurate report to the General Econome.

It is the responsibility of the Province and Local leaders to find ways by which to address this issue and comply.

- ii. Similarly, the annual contribution by every entity to the **Congregation Solidarity Fund** is not an option; it is compulsory. The decision was taken by the Congregation at the XIV General Synod (2010) and effected by norm on 1 January 2011: that

every Province, Vice Province and Vicariate shall contribute 2% of the gross annual income of the administration from Province, Vice Province, Vicariate, Local Communities, as well as 7% from the sale of properties (buildings and land).

At the request of the 46th General Chapter, the present General Council in September 2013 clarified and established officially the interpretation that for retreat houses, schools, parishes and similar institutions the contribution of the 2% applies to the net annual income.

The Solidarity Fund is established so that we can all contribute and share, not just from our plenty, but even from our little (from all we have) to assist the needs of our brothers in their life and mission, including the needs of the poor and suffering in our world. Even those who will request aid from the Solidarity Fund are required to make their contribution as a mark of their dignity... *“its in giving that we receive”*.

I urge all Economes to schedule the regular time for the annual payment to this Fund.

I take this opportunity to thank all the Provinces/Vice Provinces for your contribution to the maintenance needs of the General House which was requested at the XV General Synod (2015). No doubt you will have seen the fruits of your contribution.

In addition, I thank those who assisted us to realise other emergency maintenance issues which arose in the General House. Without your generosity the critical repairs to this building and the safety of the residents would not have been possible.

9. Laity who share our Charism

The charism is caught, not taught! There are many lay people, who through their engagement in various way with Passionists (friendship, employment, participation, belonging, partnership in ministries, identification with the spiritual gift) feel a connection to and desire a deeper identification with the Congregation and its spirituality. We can accept this as the movement of the Spirit in the Church and also as the fruit of living our First Vow: *“to recall to mind with greater love the Passion of our Lord and to promote its memory by word and deed...”*

I have encountered many lay people in my visits to the various parts of the Congregation who proudly identify themselves as ‘Passionists’ and I have always found their enthusiasm enriching, and even inspiring. Many of these people desire deeper formation in our spirituality, while others are content to be involved by assisting us in ministries.

Up until now, this growing phenomenon is active principally at the local, and in a few cases at the national, level. Each entity has developed its own model, name and method for the movement, though in some entities there exist multiple movements, each founded and directed historically by a Passionist. Some groups desire a more structured model than others would want. Some models are exclusively ‘lay’ and directed/led by religious; others are inclusive and shared – lay and religious belonging as one family.

Believing that the charism is a gift to be shared, I believe that we Passionist religious must be open to recognising those others in the Church who are ‘gifted’ and inspired by the Spirit with the same charism, accepting and including them with us in deepening our spirituality and exercising our mission “*to keep alive the memory of the Passion of Jesus as an act of God’s love*”.

It is true that the last General Chapter asked that one member of the General Council have responsibility for this area. However, in order to better understand the situation, the General Council decided that each General Consultor will be attentive to the development of the wider Passionist Family in his respective area by meeting especially with those lay people who share our charism in a deeper way and listening to their needs and aspirations.

Perhaps now, after many years of lived and learned experience, there could be the possibility of forming a Commission, consisting of religious and lay people, which would prepare **guidelines** concerning this matter for the Congregation?

10. Crisis of Abuse

At this very time the Church is living through a great crisis as a result of historical institutional abuse of minors and other vulnerable persons by clergy, religious men/women, and lay church workers. This crisis has humiliated the Church and led to loss of its credibility and diminishment of its moral authority, both within the Church and in the wider society. Regretfully, this scourge has involved Church

personnel who are called to be models of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and has included those of the highest authority who have committed abuse and who have covered-up knowledge of criminal activity to protect the reputation of the Church, thereby neglecting to believe and show pastoral care and concern for the victims.

Our Congregation has not been exempt from having to face this problem directly. This has brought about much stress, disappointment and even feelings of anger towards those who have committed these reprehensible acts.

As a religious Congregation, we strongly denounce this behaviour by our members. We commit to following the protocols required by the Church and the law of the land. We will cooperate with the processes and accept the consequent penalties applied to the offenders. While admitting our guilt where it is due, the Congregation expresses sincere and unreserved apology to the victims of abuse by our members, offering them pastoral care and the pledge to work to bring about justice and healing for the survivors.

The last General Chapter asked that: *“Based upon the specific policies established by each Episcopal Conference and Conference of Religious, each Province, Vice-Province and Vicariate is to write and publish its own policies and procedures for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults, and for dealing with a religious if he is accused of sexual misconduct.”*

Every entity was asked to send a copy of their policy/procedures to the Procurator General, though not all have done so. As we continue to see, the problem is growing and more revelations are coming to light in new places. Nowhere can we treat this issue lightly.

The General Council prepared guidelines for the Congregation in a document entitled: **Passionist Apostolic Community and Safe Ministerial Policy & Practices**. This was sent to all the members of the Congregation.

I want to also stress that these guidelines and policies document are not meant to be enshrined on the bookshelf. Rather, they are to be referred to regularly and used as a resource to form and inform the behaviour and boundaries of our members. Many investigations, commissions and experts both within the Church and civil society have identified the elements in human behaviour and attitudes which have contributed to living a lie. It is imperative that we not ignore, but that

we learn from these findings and reflect on the changes we need to make in our personal lives and in our consecrated life and formation within the Congregation.

This crisis of sexual abuse of minors by Church personnel has no doubt rocked us all. We have all been shamed and, surely, we are dealing with trying to find answers to many questions which challenge our faith, the Church, some teachings and traditions. These must be faced in truth and not denied or hidden. Our society (both religious and secular) have called out our hypocrisy and is demanding that we match our preaching of Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life with our witness of life and deeds.

While this crisis has depressed us and brought about much disillusionment, we must not lose hope. Our Congregation's spirituality is founded on the life-giving hope which comes from the Passion and Cross of Jesus. So, in the strength of our faith we can accept this time of crisis as an opportunity toward repentance and conversion – personally and communally. It is certainly a call to deep purification so that with greater trust and dependence on God who called us to this life, we can live and witness our vocation in a more truthful and genuine manner.

A priority in the Congregation must be the **renewal of ourselves as Passionist religious** in the situation of the world today.

11. Juridical changes in entities and new missions (2012 – 2018)

- ✚ SCOR (Province & Configuration of the Sacred Heart) – composed of Spain, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Panama, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Venezuela – formed in 2013.
- ✚ EXALT (Province of the Exaltation of the Cross) – composed of former Vicariates DOMIN, Liber & VICT in Brazil – formed in 2014.
- ✚ MAPRAES (Province & Configuration of Mary Presented in the Temple) – composed of Italy, Portugal and France – formed in 2015.
- ✚ CARLW (Vice Province of Charles Lwanga) – Kenya – formed in February 2017.
- ✚ GEMM (Vice Province of St Gemma) – Tanzania – formed in February 2017.
- ✚ MATAF (Vice Province of Our Lady the Mother of Africa) – Botswana, South Africa, Zambia – formed in June 2017.

- ✚ GETH (Province of Gethsemane) – composed of Brazil (former CALV) and Argentina/Uruguay (former CONC) – formed in August 2017.
- ✚ PAC (Vice Province of Our Lady of Peace) – composed of Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic – suppressed in March 2018. Puerto Rico incardinated into PAUL Province (USA) and Dominican Republic incardinated into REG Province (Mexico).
- ✚ GABR (Province of St Gabriel) – Belgium – Provincial Chapter decision to ask for suppression of Province at 47th General Chapter in October 2018 and be placed under the jurisdiction of the General Council.
- ✚ Vietnam mission (LAVA - CURIA: Our Lady of Lavang) – placed under the jurisdiction of SPIR Province, Australia in March 2015.
- ✚ St Martha's House, Bethany, Israel (CURIA) – placed under the jurisdiction of PASS Province, Philippines in December 2017.
- ✚ Myanmar mission (PASPAC) foundation – in September 2018.

12. Third Centenary of the Congregation's Foundation 2020

In 2020 our Congregation will be commemorating the 300th anniversary of its foundation. The anniversary, in its preparation and beyond, provides us with an opportunity to renew our lives as Passionists, to deepen our faithfulness to the vision of our Holy Founder, St Paul of the Cross, and to celebrate and promote our charism.

It is not a celebration of our greatness or our successes; rather, it is a celebration of God's blessings over these three centuries and the fruits borne from the fidelity of countless Passionists who, by their life and mission have kept alive the memory of the Passion of Jesus as a magnanimous and concrete act of God's love.

To prepare for this significant event, the General Council established a Jubilee Preparation Commission to coordinate preparations leading to the anniversary in 2020. The Jubilee will be launched during the 47th General Chapter. The following religious comprise the Jubilee Preparation Commission:

- Fr Ciro Benedettini (Chairman) - MAPRAES representative
- Fr Francisco Chagas (GETH) - CJC representative
- Fr Vital Otshudialokoka (SALV) - CPA representative
- Fr Gary Perritt (SPIR) - PASPAC representative
- Fr Anton Lasser (VULN) - CCH representative
- Fr Juan Ignacio Villar - SCOR representative

We are grateful and acknowledge the excellent work already begun by this Commission with abounding energy, enthusiasm and creativity. The theme chosen for the Jubilee was also adopted as the theme of the 47th General Chapter: ***Renewing Our Mission: Gratitude, Prophecy, Hope.***



It is my hope that the commemoration of this Jubilee will be celebrated in the light of **our renewal as Passionists** – both personal and communal – and aimed at:

- deepening our commitment to keep alive the Memory of the Passion of Jesus as the ultimate expression of the love of God for all people and all creation;
- finding new and contemporary ways to promote this Memory (*Memoria Passionis*);
- the renewal of our Mission to proclaim the Gospel of the Passion in today's context.

I take this occasion to encourage all parts of the Congregation to actively motivate the members of the Passionist Family to participate and be involved in:

- remembering the past humbly with thanksgiving to the God of Love and Compassion who has blessed us (***Gratitude***);
- reading the signs of the times and finding fresh ways to evangelize through the lens of the Passion of Jesus (***Prophecy***); and
- discerning God's plans and promises for a meaningful future (***Hope***).

The Jubilee Preparation Commission will present a report of its present status and plans and will dialogue with the Capitulars during the General Chapter.

Appointments by the Holy Father

We are grateful to the Holy Father, Pope Francis for his regard of our Congregation and for the trust placed in our religious by appointing the following religious to the service of leadership in local churches. I also thank these brothers of ours for their obedience and sacrifice in accepting this call by the Holy Father to service in these particular churches:

- ✚ Luis Fernando Lisboa (CALV) – appointed as Bishop of the Diocese of Pemba, Mozambique in June 2013.
- ✚ Emery Kibal Nkufi Mansong'loo – appointed as Bishop of the Diocese of Kole, Democratic Republic of Congo in May 2015.
- ✚ Jesús María Aristín Seco – appointed as Apostolic Administrator of the Apostolic Vicariate of Yurimaguas, Peru in December 2016.
- ✚ Amilton Manoel da Silva – appointed as Auxiliary Bishop in the Archdiocese of Curitiba, Brazil in June 2017.

Congregation visits and meetings (2013 – 2018)

While the travel can be stressful and take its toll, I have truly appreciated visiting and meeting our religious and members of the Passionist Family, participating in Chapters/Congresses, and various other celebrations. This has been my greatest joy and an enriching experience of my ministry. It has allowed me to engage in a personal and practical way with people, experience first-hand our life and mission in the different cultures and contexts, share vision, listen, encourage, challenge and proclaim the Gospel of the Passion.

Following is a list of my travels in the 6-year period:

- 2013:** Democratic Republic of Congo (SALV) – Congress (March)
England/Wales (IOS) – Chapter (April)
India (THOM) – Congress (May)
Philippines/Sweden (PASS) – Chapter (May)
Spain (CORI/FAM/SANG) – Visitation (June)
Peru (SCOR) – Chapter (June)
Brazil – Meeting with Young Passionists and World Youth Day (July)
Brazil (CALV) – Visitation & Chapter (July/August)
Puerto Rico/Dominican Republic (PAC) – Congress (September)
New York (PAUL) – 160 years of Passionist presence (October)
Sutton (IOS) – 50 years Beatification of Bl Dominic Barberi (October)
- 2014:** Vietnam (LAVANG) – Visitation (January)
Highgate, London (CURIA) – Meeting (January)
Kenya (CARLW) – Visitation (February)
Tanzania (GEMM) – Visitation (February)
Brazil (LIBER/VIC/DOMIN) – Visitation (March)
Rome - Recuperation from heart surgery (April to July)
• *Brazil (EXALT) – Chapter (May)...Fr Augusto Canali*

- *USA (PAUL) – Chapter (May)...Fr Denis Travers*
- *Belgium (GABR) – Chapter...Fr Denis Travers*
- *Poland (ASSUM) – Chapter...Fr Augusto Canali*
- *Argentina (CONC) – Chapter...Fr Augusto Canali*

Japan (MAIAP) – Visitation (August/September)

Korea/China (MACOR) – Visitation/Chapter/50 years presence (October)

PASPAC – Leaders' Meeting, Korea (October)

Indonesia (REPAC) – Visitation (October/November)

Japan (MAIAP) – Congress (December)

2015:Indonesia (REPAC) – Chapter (January)

Brazil (EXALT) – Assembly (January)

Italy (PRAES) – Visitation (February)

Italy (PIET) – Visitation (February/March)

Italy (CORM) – Visitation (March)

Italy (DOL) – Visitation (March)

Italy (LAT) – Visitation (March)

Italy (CFIXI) – Visitation (March)

Portugal (FAT) – Visitation (March/April)

Paris Mission, France (PATR) – Visit on Easter Sunday (April)

France (MICH) – Visitation (April)

Mexico (REG/SCOR) – 150 years of Passionist presence (April)

Bulgaria (PIET) – Visitation (May)

Rome (MAPRAES) – Chapter (May)

Puerto Rico (PAC) – Extraordinary Visitation (May)

USA (CRUC) – Visitation & Chapter (June)

Australia/PNG (SPIR) – Visitation & Chapter (June/July)

Sweden (PASS) – Visitation & Convention (July)

Highgate, London (CURIA) – Visitation (August/September)

XV General Synod – Rome (October)

2016:Poland (ASSUM) – Visitation (February)

Rome – Passionists International Conference on Migrants/Refugees (February)

Bethany, Israel (CURIA) – Visitation (February/March)

Australia (SPIR) – Assembly (March/April)

Germany/Austria (VULN) – Visitation & Congress (April)

Netherlands (SPE) – Visitation & Chapter (April)

Belgium (GABR) – Visitation (April/May)

Mexico (REG) – Visitation & Chapter (May/June)

Ireland/Scotland (PATR) – Visitation & Chapter (June)

Sao Paulo, Brazil (CALV) – Spirituality Congress (July)

Russe, Bulgaria (MAPRAES) – Visit (August)

Argentina (CONC) – Visitation (August)
Chile/Ecuador/Colombia/Honduras/El Salvador (SCOR) – Visitation (August/September)
Highgate, London (CURIA) – Visitation (September)

2017:Japan (MAIAP) – Assembly (January)

Pathein, Myanmar – Visit re new Mission (January)

Rome - *Medical intervention* – (February)

- Kenya (CARLW) – Congress (February)...Fr Michael Ogweno
- Tanzania (GEMM) – Congress (February)...Fr Michael Ogweno

Congo (SALV) – Congress (March)

England/Wales (IOS) – Chapter (April)

Philippines/Sweden (PASS) – Chapter (May)

India (THOM) – Congress (May)

Mozambique (CALV) – Visitation (June)

Botswana/South Africa/Zambia (MATAF) – Visitation & Congress (June)

Panama (SCOR) – Chapter (June)

Ponta Grossa, Brazil – Chapter of new Province GETH (August)

Puerto Rico/Dominican Republic (PAC) – Congress (September)

2018:Sicily, Italy (MAPRAES) – Celebration (February)

Highgate, London (CURIA) – Visitation (February)

Brazil (EXALT) – Visitation (February/March)

Belgium (GABR) – Visitation (April)

USA (PAUL) – Visitation & Chapter (April/May)

Belgium (GABR) – Chapter (June)

Poland (ASSUM) – Chapter (June)

Brazil (EXALT) – Visitation & Chapter (July)

47th General Chapter – Rome (October)

**Note: Most of the canonical visitations were conducted by the General Consultors and some appointed delegates. They also participated in Configuration assemblies and meetings, as have the General Econome, the Secretary for Mission & Solidarity, and the Secretary for Formation.*

GRATITUDE & APPRECIATION

- ✚ To all Provincials, Vice Provincials, Regional Vicars, Consultors, Presidents of Configurations, Local Superiors, Economes and Formators – for your commitment in leadership and service to our Brothers and the Passionist family;
- ✚ To P. Matteo Nonini, P. Adiantus Aloysius and the past Superiors/Vicars/Economes; P. Augusto Matrullo (Rector of Basilica); P. Vito Patera (Director of Retreat House); P. Adriano Spina (retired General House Librarian); P. Mario Collu (Librarian); and all those who lived and served in the various ministries of the General House of SS. Giovanni e Paolo;
- ✚ To our Passionist Sisters (Daughters of the Passion) for their tireless and humble service to us all every day in the General House;
- ✚ To all the entities for your generous financial contribution to the General Administration, the maintenance and restoration work of the General House, and to the Congregation Solidarity Fund;
- ✚ To all members of the various Commissions and Committees: finance, house, formation, historical, General Chapter & 300 Jubilee Preparation;
- ✚ To all those who served in the General Curia over the past 6 years:
 - Fr Ramiro Ruiz (Secretary General)
 - Fr Robert Coward – RIP (Translator)
 - Fr Fernando Piélagos (Translator, History writing)
 - Fr Massimo Granieri (Webmaster)
 - Fr Stanley Baldon (Webmaster)
 - Fr Lawrence Rywalt (Translator, Communications & PIB)
 - Mr Andrea Marzolla (Webmaster)
 - Fr Giovanni Zubiani (Postulator General)
 - Fr Paul Cherukoduth (Secretary General)
 - Ms Federica Franco (Office of Secretary General)
 - Fr Floriano De Fabiis (Procurator General & Assistant to Passionist Nuns)
 - Fr Jesús Maria Arístín (Secretary for Mission & Solidarity, JPIC)
 - Fr Aloyce Babene (Assistant to Secretary for Mission & Solidarity)
 - Fr Battista Ramponi (Econome General)
 - Fr Massimo Parisi (Postulator General)
 - Fr Alessandro Ciciliani (Historical Commission President)

- Fr Martin Coffey (Secretary for Formation)
- Ms Eunice Dos Santos (Archivist General)
- Frs Silvio Vanzan & John Baptist Ormachea (General Archives)
- Fr Antonio Munduate (Procurator General)
- Fr Alessandro Foppoli (Sup. Gen. Personal Secretary)
- Fr Fernando Ruiz (Secretary General)
- Fr Vincenzo Carletti (Econome General)
- Fr Paolo Aureli (Secretary for Mission & Solidarity)
- Mr Franco Nicolo (Assistant in Mission & Solidarity Office)
- Fr Leonello Leidi (Canon Law Advisor)

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Conclusion

In concluding this report, I want to return once again to the beginning in which I propose the thesis that if we are to “renew our mission”, then we must “renew ourselves”. These two are integrally connected and one cannot happen without the other. Of course, it goes without saying that “**renewal**” is an ongoing call of the Gospel for us **to choose life**; we are to examine and listen to all that is happening in our lives, hear the call and promptings of the Spirit, and respond by abandoning in trust to God: “*let what you have said be done to me*” (Lk. 1:38).

Also, if renewal is to be genuine, then it must be soul-deep. It is more than just a superficial change of mind which can be mere cosmetic alterations to the surface. Rather, renewal implies a reworking, a refashioning, a recasting at the much deeper level of the soul. Renewal is concerned with interiority and has to do with the heart. It is the narrow and hard way that leads to life (Mt. 7:13-14), which is precisely why “those who find it are few.”

In the situation of deep crisis being faced by the Church and the religious life in these times, we cannot remain deaf to the call of the Spirit or ignore reading the ‘signs of the times’. We must remain alert and more

than ever adopt a **contemplative stance**. In this present situation simply suggesting and making external changes are not sufficient. They are temporary and will not be long-lasting. Something deeper and more permanent must be sought, i.e. our willingness (personally and communally) to be split apart and reknit back together by God – **renewal**.

Hand-in-hand with adopting a contemplative stance, we need to also cultivate a **prophetic and charismatic stance** by giving greater attention to reflecting on and witnessing through the evangelical counsels which is at the heart of our consecrated life and intimately connected to our mission.

Renewal of our mission will not be possible if the missionary does not let go and let God (abandonment, surrender). When Jesus missioned the 72 disciples, he challenged them: “*Carry no bag, no sack, no sandals*” (Lk.10:4). It sounds very tough. But what we might perceive as an exaggerated demand, is in the first place an encouragement to place our **trust in God**. This touches **the heart of every mission**. Remember, the mission is God’s, not ours! It is God who send us. So, a mission without trust in the sender is nothing but a joke. This is closely connected to our commitment to evangelical poverty, the heart of which is our letting go of self and entrusting ourselves to God. Only a mission in ‘poverty’ is wholly credible. As the report in this encounter indicates:

There was a Hindu professor in India who wrote to a priest friend and acknowledged many of the values of the Catholic Church, but also shared two critical observations. The first is that we talk too much in committees, meetings, task forces, liturgies and so on. The second one was that we are too well equipped and endowed. Both of these insights seem to be related and to point to the fact that we have a tendency to be in control. It seems that these two flaws hindered this Hindu person from finding God in our church.

Jesus always preached and lived poverty and it is essential that we deliberately and resolutely keep in step with the poor Jesus. From the very beginning the mission of Jesus was one of self-emptying (cf. Phil.2:7-8). As Passionists we are called “*to have that same attitude that also Christ Jesus had*” (v.5) and **to live** the self-emptying of Jesus, so that there is no place for striking a bargain (making deals) in our mission. Certainly, “*the labourer deserves his keep,*” yet in the same breath we are told: “*Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give*” (Mt.10:8,10).

The clear message is that we are not to strive after our own profit, whether that might mean money, career, standard of living, prestige, affirmation, recognition, influence, control, power. We are to trust that God will give us generously what we need for a psychologically sound and happy life, mostly through people. We are not to worry about that.

Jesus found such a security in his Abba. We, in turn, can find much assurance and fulfilment in **Jesus - the fine pearl for which we gladly give up everything** (cf. Mt.13:44-46). Evangelical poverty is the expression of a fulfilment and inner freedom, which enables us to live very simply. Its essence is not deficiency but fullness, not giving up much but having found much.

I end with this story which describes well this inner wealth and fulfilment:

The holy man had reached the outskirts of the village and settled down under a tree for the night when a villager came running up to him and said, 'The stone! The stone! Give me the precious stone!'

'What stone?' asked the holy man.

'Last night the Lord Shiva appeared to me in a dream,' said the villager, 'and told me that if I went to the outskirts of the village at dusk I should find a holy man who would give me a precious stone that would make me rich forever.'

The holy man rummaged in his bag and pulled out a stone. 'He probably meant this one,' he said, as he handed the stone over to the villager. 'I found it on a forest path some days ago. You can certainly have it.'

The man looked at the stone in wonder. It was a diamond. Probably the largest diamond in the whole world for it was as large as a man's head.

He took the diamond and walked away. All night he tossed about in bed, unable to sleep. Next day at the crack of dawn he woke the holy man and said, 'Give me the wealth that makes it possible for you to give away this diamond so easily.'

My hope is that this General Chapter will call us to a **renewal of our life**, the process through which we will encounter again and deepen our relationship with Jesus Crucified - the source for **renewing our mission**. Thus, we pray:

Let our Chapter be a motivation for permanent personal conversion and for a creative rethinking of our life and our work. Renew the Passionist mission and make of us the new wine of a new Church. Amen.

(Prayer for the 47th General Chapter)

~ Fr Joachim Rego CP
Superior General

Retreat of SS. Giovanni e Paolo
Rome
10 September 2018

