XII General Synod

“Father... not my will, but yours be done.”

(Lk. 22:42)
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Passionist International Bulletin
N° 7 - Special Issue
New Series - February 2005

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From 28 November to 6 December, 2004 the XII General Synod of the Congregation took place at the Generalate of Sts. John and Paul in Rome, Italy. It was originally scheduled to take place in Cuernavaca, Mexico at the end of September, 2004. However, due to the sudden illness and subsequent surgery of our Superior General, Fr. Ottaviano D’Egidio, it was postponed and transferred to Rome.

Thus, Fr. Ottaviano D’Egidio and sixty Passionist religious from around the world gathered on the Celio hilltop in the historic center of the Eternal City to pray, listen, study, discuss and plan for the future of the Congregation. All of the activity centered on the theme of the “Restructuring of the Congregation”.

With the skilled assistance of the Synod participants sought to open new ways into a brighter and more vibrant future for the Congregation.

This special issue of the Passionist International Bulletin seeks to highlight some of the aspects of this Synod. Several of the major presentations were chosen for publication here as well as a special interview with the Moderator, Brother Luis. The official texts in their entirety can be found the separate publication of the Acts of the XII General Synod.

We also chose to include some information on the liturgical theme of the olive tree and corresponding Biblical texts that provided the basis for the common prayer and meditation during the Synod. Because these words would be insufficient to capture all of the various dimensions of this gathering, we also include numerous photographs as illustrations of the various texts and activities in the hope that they will speak for themselves.

In addition to the official working sessions of the Synod, several opportunities were also provided for relaxation and recreation. Among these were a concert in the “Sala dei Papi”, and an outing to the city of Naples, as well as various informal gatherings.

The Synod came to a joyful conclusion with the celebration of the elevation of the SALV Vice-Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo.
It is the sincere hope of the editorial team of the PIB that this publication will assist the Congregation to better understand and embrace the matter of the Restructuring of the Congregation as it moves toward the upcoming General Chapter of 2006. The upcoming issue of the PIB will resume its usual format. Once again we take this opportunity to ask all of the religious of the Congregation, in particular those in secretarial positions of provincial or vice-provincial leadership to be diligent in providing material for this publication so that we may continue to grow in solidarity with each other.

Fr. Giuliano Bonelli (PRAES) and his musical group

The Basilica of Sts. John and Paul, Rome
We have chosen to celebrate the first liturgy of the Synod here in the garden of Sts. John and Paul. Among the many different types of trees found here, there are also olive trees. During these days, throughout the Mediterranean region including Italy, olives are being harvested. At some of the original monasteries founded by St. Paul of the Cross such as Ceccano and Paliano olives are being harvested much as they were at the time of the Founder.

The olive was native to Asia Minor and spread from Iran, Syria and Palestine to the rest of the Mediterranean basin 6,000 years ago. It is among the oldest known cultivated trees in the world - being grown before the written language was invented. The olive culture was spread to the early Greeks and then to the Romans. As the Romans extended their domain they brought the olive with them.

The use of olive oil is found in many religions and cultures. It has been used during special ceremonies and also as a general health meas-
Olive trees have a “mind” of their own and as such they will sometimes resist efforts to prune them into shape. However, perseverance over a period of time will enable a tree that won’t grow correctly this season to be restaked and then pruned into shape next season.

The olive tree often has a long life span. The olive trees on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem are reputed to be over 2000 years old. Olive trees are periodically pruned to maximize their growth, keep them in good health, and very importantly, prepare them for harvesting. During the process of pruning diseased or broken branches are removed. Horizontal branches are trimmed to renew fruit-bearing wood. Vertical branches are thinned to open the tree to more light and to keep the branches vegetative and vigorous. A good combination of the two is necessary for the tree to bear fruit now and in future years.

This shrine where we are now praying recalls Jesus’ prayer in that Garden, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Garden of Olives, the night before he died.

Like the harvesting and the pressing of the olives for their oil, Jesus’ life and teaching would be harvested and pressed during his Passion in accord with the Father’s will. Together as brothers in our common baptism and our profession of vows, we begin this Synod so that new life might continue to flow from our Congregation, in union with the Passion of Jesus, for the life of the world.
My dear brothers,

I don’t think that you were expecting a scientific, technical presentation on the topic of restructuring. I will make some points during my intervention, but I think that during these days we should all try to more or less arrive at some common understanding of this topic. My contribution to this Synod will center on the current situation of the Congregation and on why at the present time we are speaking about restructuring.

In my report to you on restructuring during the Synod that we celebrated in 2002 in Korea I told you that we cannot understand the reality of the vicariates without an understanding of the global reality of the Congregation. Therefore, it is necessary to begin with a study that takes into consideration the entire Congregation due to the imbalance of the vital forces that are a reality within the Congregation. I also referred to the exhortation that Vatican Council II gave to religious institutes to search out more authentic means of becoming more present and effective in today’s continuously changing world. The decree *Perfectae Caritatis* (1965) very clearly states at No. 2: “The adaptation and renewal of the religious life includes both the constant return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time.” However, with equal directness it states: “It should be constantly kept in mind, therefore, that even the best adjustments made in accordance with the needs of our age will be ineffectual unless they are animated by a renewal of spirit. This must take precedence over even the active ministry.” Therefore an effective renewal and adaptation can be achieved only with the collaboration of all the members of the Institute and by conveniently adapting the way in which we live, pray and function according to the current physical and psychological conditions of its members, as well as – as is demanded by the uniqueness of every institute – according to the needs of the apostolate, to the demands of the culture, to the social and economic situation, especially in mission areas. Additionally, the form of government needs to be examined using the same criteria. This impulse given by Vatican II needs to be implemented today by our Congregation. Before moving to a listing of the specific factors that today urge us to act upon this process of restructuring without further delay, I wish to present the statistics of the Congregation during the past twenty years, i.e. from 1983 to 2003, so as to achieve a global vision of the Congregation:

1. First, to have a geographic panorama of how the Congregation is diffused in the world today.

2. Then, to know the present number of religious in each province, vice-province and vicariate. The number is indicated on the map.

3. Finally, to see how the Congregation during these past twenty years has grown or
diminished in the various conferences.

In my opinion, this geographical data and statistics give us an idea of the *implantation*, how the Congregation is situated in the world and it clarifies how many we currently number and the capacity that we have to carry out the mission that has been entrusted to us Passionists, as well as our need to be attentive to the weariness resulting from the work undertaken during this period. Restructuring is a charismatic, vital and structural response appropriate to the mission that has been entrusted to us in accord with the demands and the needs of our age. In other words, we envision restructuring as a process, a dynamic for personal and community transformation that examines the present reality, evaluates the structures that currently exist and, if necessary, proposes changes so that we can be faithful to our charism and to our mission. Therefore, restructuring consists fundamentally in finding new means of organizing ourselves and, if necessary, establishing new structures in order to adhere with greater fidelity to the charism of the Congregation. This also requires a new sensibility in light of present challenges as well as a new mentality, a new way of witnessing and announcing the Gospel. Consequently we need to rediscover a new anthropological basis for our structures that must always be at the service of people and of their desire for life.

Restructuring cannot only be a reaction to incidental situations that require a clear position and subsequent action. Above all, restructuring should emanate from a positive attitude. Furthermore, if at the same time we do not also have a desire for vitality and viability and we only seek out solutions on an administrative level or for future security, we can also make restructuring a way of responding to a momentary need, for example, the reduced number of vocations. However, all of these efforts, as always, would result in being incomplete and imprecise if we try to address the difficulties without going to the heart of the matter with an open mind: restructuring is for life.

We cannot say that nothing has changed since the founding of our Congregation. From time to time we evaluate the road that we have been traveling; we change our Regulations if necessary and we ask the Holy See to change the constitutions when we note that the changes in the world or its vision no longer allows for them to be observed. There are provinces who from time to time try to adapt their own structures based upon demands and available manpower always keeping in mind the chief concern of fulfilling our mission. This means that we are not beginning from point zero with regard to restructuring. Some efforts have already been made on the local level and this is a positive sign of the dynamism of the Congregation and attentiveness to the signs of the times. Perhaps the new element that compels us to address this issue at this time is the desire of the entire Congregation to undertake the process and to do so as a single Congregation. And our Superior General in his numerous interventions concerning restructuring, has always promoted this idea of encouraging study on the process of restructuring no longer as a province, but as a Congregation.

Fr. Luigi Vaninetti in the PIB No. 4 in conjunction with this fundamental concept of Fr. General presents restructuring to us as a re-definition of religious life, a widening of the horizon of the congregation, the true entity to which we belong more than
to individual provinces, and to promote a
dynamic of listening, of challenge and of
coop- responsibility free from any attitude of
self centeredness and from every institu-
tional and territorial superiority. There is
no need to enclose oneself in one’s own
province; rather, we must try to become
part of the process of the Congregation.
We can no longer think as a single
province, but as a Congregation. This is
the innovation. And the responsibility that
this implies for each of us Passionists is seri-
ous because we want to offer our
Congregation a new direction, a new orienta-
tion, a new presence in the world, adapting
our charism and spirituality according to the
signs of the times.

The positive and negative factors that urge
us toward restructuring today:

1. The world as the context for fulfilling
our mission: Secularization and
Globalization.

Who of us can say that we do not feel chal-
enged by today’s world when we consider
some of the signs of the times and some
means that were in use 50 years ago? Who
can still say that these means and methods are
still useful today? Who would say to us that
the ways that we used to reach young people
50 years ago are still valid today?

In light of the rapidly changing world in
which we live many of us have also asked
ourselves if our mission still has meaning so
as to honestly legitimize it and, above all, if it
still has a future existence. Perhaps we have
asked ourselves if the spiritual and mission-
ary institution of St. Paul of the Cross with all
the traditions that proceed from it, still has a
place in this world. The phenomenon of sec-
ularization has already been experienced
everywhere. Globalization, which has
become almost fashionable in today’s world
and before which no one can remain indiffer-
ent, continues to diffuse itself, imposing its
logic and discipline on all of humanity. And
the many other factors that characterize this
world make it such that we can no longer fur-
ther our mission without frequently question-
ing ourselves about its validity and efficacy.

2. The total decline of vocations in our
Congregation.

Statistics have demonstrated how the
Congregation is undergoing a severe, wide-
spread process of diminishment. The number
of young men who consecrated themselves in
the First World 50 years ago, today is at zero.
The new world offers some signs of life, but
even there a severe decrease of vocations is
being experienced.

3. The age of the religious of the First
World.

In the First World the majority of the reli-
gious are aged. This means that manpower is
in a state of on-going decline and that it is
necessary to consider a new way of being
present in the world. This also means that the
Congregation must search for new ways of
organizing itself in order to create new, viable
structures for those aged religious. Perhaps
this needs to begin in those provinces where
70% of the religious are very elderly, and
those that are younger run the risk of not
being able to fulfill ministerial commitments
as well as to care for the aged and infirm reli-
gious in the retreats. How do we arrive at an
adequate solution for such a complex situa-
tion? It would be good to initiate an honest
discussion with those religious who are in
this situation in order to find a solution.
Perhaps it would be good to think about ren-
ovating a part of the retreat for our aged and infirm religious or make arrangements with currently existing professional health-care organizations. Are there other solutions? At any rate, a solution to this problem must be discovered in those areas where satisfactory alternatives have not yet been employed.

4. The development of the Congregation in the New World.

By New World I mean those areas where the Congregation has recently been established, i.e. Africa, parts of Asia and an area of Latin America. Here the Congregation has recently begun to create a presence and is in a period of growth. However, in my opinion, this growth is stunted because even here they are beginning to experience a lack of vocations, or else they find themselves in financial difficulty that becomes an obstacle to the recruitment of numerous candidates.

5. The desire to be open to the realities of today’s world: the Intercultural factor

Generally, people of today’s world possess a cosmopolitan mentality, i.e. they want to familiarize themselves with the world at large and they want to understand what other people do, how they live, etc. Nations can no longer claim: ‘This culture is unique to us.’ This is because of the changes that are occurring today. There is a cultural clash that cannot be ignored, and which needs on-going attention. Unfortunately, in our Congregation the number of religious willing to go the missions continues to decrease – which confirms this mentality – everyone wanting to stay in his own house, in his province, vice-province or vicariate. In part this may be attributed to the mind-set that we have our own concerns that are ever more localized as well as the reality of the decrease in the number of young religious, both of which are decisive factors in this matter.

6. The migration of people

The ethnic groups originating in the southern or eastern areas of the globe continue to migrate to the countries of the North and West, groups that in general are lacking in necessary pastoral assistance. The preaching of the Gospel has no boundaries and, together with all of the Church, we should understand ourselves to be challenged by the reality of this situation and discover adequate ways of reaching them in order to bring them the Gospel. It is understandable that the presence of these peoples among us and their acceptance may cause psychological tension in some individuals who are rooted in their own cultures (surely an erroneous way of thinking). However, this mind-set can be overcome by understanding this matter within a Christian context in which love that has no boundaries impels us to bring the Gospel to the entire world and to all people.

7. The Lay Passionist movement

Our brothers and sisters who form part of the lay movement and who lovingly share with us the charisma of St. Paul of the Cross cannot remain outside the process of restructuring, and should even directly share in this course of action. Various provinces have had positive experiences with our brothers and sisters in lay movements, which in the present situation of our Congregation can no longer be ignored, but on the contrary, must be integrated and incorporated into the dynamic of our process of restructuring. Today the presence of the lay Passionist movement is something that can be viewed in a positive way and as something which is very hopeful for our Congregation.

8. The Inadequacy of forms and structures of life.

Undoubtedly, the forms and manner in
which we live today may cause serious difficulties or barriers for the young. Not only life-styles, the observance, time schedules, etc., but also structures: the religious house or retreats in which these forms of life exist are perhaps no longer attractive to young people.

WHAT HAS BEEN DISCUSSED IN THE CONFERENCES WITH REGARD TO RESTRUCTURING?

I have participated in some assemblies of the conferences which have had “restructuring” as their topic. The visions of restructuring in the conferences are varied depending on the regions and above all depending on needs that this change involves.

A) According to the Passionist Conference of Asia-Pacific (PASPAC) restructuring means finding another form of being Passionist in their region; it means reinforcing the reduced groupings of personnel in their conferences. They seek some other vision of being Passionist.

B) In Africa restructuring is seen as a new form of collaboration between the vicariates. This conference, being constituted only of vicariates, views that reality as a dynamic that should help the vicariates in their movement toward greater autonomy given that they are entities that are in the process of growth in the Congregation.

C) Northern Europe (NEC) is a very complex issue. I highlight two issues:

1. The care of our aged religious in our communities: we need to find adequate solutions for making life for our elderly more livable. But how? The search for adequate solutions must include dialog with the religious themselves.

2. Re: Our pastoral presence in this secularized and globalized world – Should we leave the structures as they presently exist or should we re-create them using more youthful energies? They don’t know how to address this or how to accomplish it.

D) The Conference of the Iberian Peninsula (CII). The topic of restructuring cannot be addressed in this region merely on a geographical level; it must go beyond this region. In addition to the province of Spain, the reality of this situation must also include their active and numerous forms of presence in Central and South America. However, they realize the urgency of beginning this process, even if it is not addressed openly due to the difficulty in locating adequate addresses.

E) In North America (IPCM) restructuring is understood as something that needs to be done in order to arrive at appropriate conclusions and as part of an on-going process carried out with courage, conviction and exactness. Fr. Robert Joerger, General Consultor, informs us that within the context of our charism, of our mission and the formulation of inter-provincial means of collaboration, the participants have suggested that further cooperation among the provinces is needed particularly in the areas of pastoral ministry, administration and communication. (See article of Fr. Robert, PIB No. 4). However, the Congregation by itself cannot further this process. It needs to do this in collaboration with the larger Passionist Family in North America, thus allowing the answer to come from within the entire Passionist family.

F) The Italian Conference (CIPI). The CIPI Assembly arrived at a consensus regarding the general objective of restructuring as a
witness to communion of life and to the “memoria passionis” and the urgency of involving all of the religious so that they become familiarized with the issue of restructuring as a process in which they have a part to play. Therefore a process of awareness needs to be employed by means of common programming, including on the inter-provincial level (See, Fr. Luigi’s article, PIB, No. 4, April 2004).

G) The Latin-American Conference (CLAP). From the very beginning, our religious of Latin America have considered restructuring as a new way of being Passionists in that part of the world, even if the process has been impeded by trying to keep up with the speed at which changes are taking place. However their idea was not to continue to increase the number of Passionist entities (structures), rather to try to reduce them and to build smaller units or stronger structures. This was the positive thrust of the Passionists of Brazil.

These are some of the ideas that emerged from the meetings of the conferences in which I was involved. Naturally there are many more ideas, but we have to realize that we are still in the questioning phase. I would like to summarize some of the main lines of thought:

Restructuring is a process undertaken by the Congregation so that it may best respond to the challenges of today’s world. To enter into this process it is necessary to seriously ask ourselves: Are our present structures effectively and efficaciously at the service of our Passionist mission? How do these structures function? Do they truly help us to address the demands of the charism and to respond to the pastoral needs of today’s world? What are the pastoral needs to which our Congregation is called to respond today? What structures help us so that we might better respond to these needs? What criteria do we have to identify our obligation to respond to the poor and the abandoned? What will help us to discern true pastoral imperatives? These questions may seem to be abstract and detached from our everyday concerns and cares, but they are questions that address the various factors that we have named which challenge us to embrace the process of restructuring.

CONVERSION

We are called to conversion. We are called to re-examine the road that we have taken up to this point in time, to again discuss our response to the present demands of our mission as envisioned by St. Paul of the Cross, to review our style of life, our mind set and our way of organizing ourselves. We are invited to respond with creative fidelity to the challenges of our mission in the modern world. We are called to be faithful to the charism of the Congregation and to the spirit of our Founder. We are called to be attentive to new ways of responding to the demands of proclaiming the Gospel, of proclaiming the “Memoria Passionis” by witnessing renewed life and structures.
REFLECTIONS ON THE RESTRUCTURING
OF THE PASSIONIST CONGREGATION
XII GENERAL SYNOD ROME, 28 NOVEMBER - 6 DECEMBER 2004

Fr. Ottaviano D’Egidio, C.P.

When we began the Synod with the liturgy in the garden, we used the verses from Mark’s gospel regarding the institution of the Eucharist during the Last Supper of Jesus and also the account of Gethsemane.

“Take it”, it is given, “Take it, this is my body” – He gives his entire life. “Then he took the cup...and gave it to them... This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many...” He pours out and gives his blood being certain of new life, “I shall not drink again...until the day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” (Mt. 14: 22-26).

In light of his imminent Passion, Jesus demonstrates his absolute trust in God. There is great harmony and continuity between the Last Supper, Gethsemane and Calvary. “I have greatly desired to eat this Passover meal with you...”, “Take it, this is my body... This is my blood... which will be shed for many...” Then in Gethsemane: “Father...Take this cup away from me...but not what I will but what you will.” And finally on Calvary: “Father, why have you abandoned me...Father into your hands I commend my spirit.”

There is the sadness and the anguish of Jesus the man and then the obedience of Jesus the Son. It would be death, a difficult death made even more so by loneliness and rejection, “he came among his own people and his own people did not receive him”, but it would produce new and abundant life. Jesus knows that his death is a plan for life.

New life, the fruit of his death will be like something that is drunk in the Reign of God. But this does not exclude the fact that Jesus, on the Mount of Olives, in Gethsemane (in Aramaic, “gat se mane”—the olive press), would experience anguish that would tear apart his soul so near was his suffering and Passion: Jesus is the olive that is crushed in the olive press. He knew, as happens to human beings, about the generosity of giving a gift and the desire to take it back, the serenity of surrender and the fear of being lost. But it would not be taken away; in his heart there is unconditional acceptance: “but not what I will but what you will.” Jesus knows that his Passion is a plan of God. Jesus is judged and rejected by men, but the chalice comes from the hands of the Father.

Our task during this Synod is to discern “the project and the will of God” with regard to our Congregation and its structures; to reflect on our life, as a Congregation, from within the present globalized world and from the perspective and effectiveness of our mission in it.

We are all aware of the challenges to unite our consecration with the Passion of Jesus even to its very roots and that in many countries this is a challenge that involves the very survival of the Congregation. With the Church of Vatican II and of the post-Council we have made great strides at renewal, but it is necessary to go further. We cannot close our minds and hearts and enclose ourselves within old juridical structures hoping to preserve them. It is necessary to courageously go forward in order to be yeast in a changing world. The effectiveness of our Mission is our very life. We are alive if we carry out our Mission, as yeast is alive only when it leavens the dough. If yeast decides to preserve itself, it chooses death for its life force.

Together we must overcome the resistance and fear in our own hearts and in the hearts of the religious entrusted to us. It
might seem to be about death, but it will be a choice for life. To keep grains of wheat in an alabaster or earthen jar is not about choosing life and defending it, rather over time the grain dries up and looses its capacity to generate life. The grain of wheat planted in the earth, as if lost, will sprout and bring forth new life. Likewise the olives in the olive-press are pressed and lose their form, but the perfumed oil that they produce served to consecrate the kings of the Old Testament, to consecrate the Sons of God and to serve as ointment to heal people’s wounds. Thus was Jesus during his Passion. It seemed as if all was ended on that darkest Friday in history – “we had hoped…” the disciples on the road to Emmaus would say. But then they learned to recognize him because new life was born within the empty tomb. It is within the context of this process of death and resurrection to new life that we situate ourselves in order to study the topic of Re-structuring and it is from within this context that I fraternally greet all of you here present.

It is good to be together once again. But that which we are celebrating is a Synod, traversed and obstructed by the Cross: presently there is the sickness of Fr. Umberto Palmerini, as well as that of the presenter Fr. Liberti, S.J. and that which occurred last September when the Synod was to have been celebrated in Mexico and was impeded because of my sudden and unexpected surgery. The mystics understood these impediments as obstacles of the “enemy” to frustrate those things that promote the Kingdom of God. We persevere with faith in doing the will of God. Changing the place and date of the Synod was not an easy decision, and then the General Council, weighing the various options, decided to hold the Synod in Rome at the end of this month of November 2004.

At this time I wish to thank the all of the religious of the REG Province, especially Fr. Francisco Valadez, the Provincial Superior, together with the present Curia and Fr. Alfonso Iberri, the former Provincial Superior and his council for their preparation of this event. On the occasion of the celebration of the provincial Chapter and the visits to the communities that preceded it, which I fondly recall, I expressed my appreciation for the dedication and accomplishment of projects which in themselves will stay intact for the pastoral and cultural activity of the Province and, God willing, will be ready to be enjoyed at the next Synod of the Congregation. We too, were greatly disappointed and we apologize for the situation. However there is a Latin proverb: Quod differtur non aequatur – that which is postponed is not lost. Hence, the participants at the next General Chapter can once again choose Mexico as the site for the next Synod of the Congregation in 2008 or we ourselves are free to choose it for the celebration of the General Chapter of 2006.

My dear brothers, this is not just any Synod that we are celebrating, a Synod like all the others, although they too were important, from a past that has oriented and supported our life and our on-going formation. I believe that this Synod is a vital event for the Congregation. With this in mind, more than merely to observe, considering my absence, and according to what is prescribed in the Constitutions at No.144 “a consultative body to help the Superior General”, is the explanation of the decision to reschedule the Synod from the end of September to the end of November. This is a topic that we must study together, in strength. It was necessary for all of us to be present to be able to understand and to consciously make decisions — the General Council and the major superiors.

It is a topic that I take seriously and I am convinced that we are a part, in this present historical moment, of a plan of God for the Congregation and I say this humbly, with great
trepidation and a sense of responsibility concerning how difficult it is to surrender oneself, as it was for Jesus in Gethsemane! We cannot run away from the Word of the Lord like Jonah or like him to be annoyed or upset if the plans of God are different from our plans (Crf. Jonah 1:3; 4:1).

All of us with our conversations and our experiences, collected in communities, provinces, and vicariates and from the people among whom we live, are the great resource of this Synod. We have to assume responsibility for the task of identifying where and in what way the Holy Spirit wishes to direct the road of the life of the Congregation and to make adequate decisions for its present and for its future. We can enable life or we can impede it, be defeated by difficulties or defeat them. There are still possibilities for Rebirth and Revitalization. However, in order for them to be concretely realized they must be grounded in innovation, in a creative spirit and in the awareness of the power that is derived from our charism and from the living presence of God in history. It is necessary to believe this and to cross over the Red Sea of fear and indecision. The Spirit urges and impels us not to remain in the present situations. Let us be roused by the power of our Charism! St. Paul of the Cross did not found the Congregation to continue to do that which already existed. Rather he generated a new force, a new wind of Spirit that overtook the Church and the world, so much so that it is said that Pope Benedict XIV declared: “this Congregation, that is the last to be born, should have been the first to be born.” “To generate a new strength, a wind of the Spirit”—is what the today’s world situation asks of us and the Congregation at large, the women religious and laity of the Passionist family in the 58 countries in which we are present and where we minister.

During the past four years, following the General Chapter of August-September 2000 in Brazil, I have had the opportunity to visit all the Provinces, Vice-Provinces and many of the Vicariates of the Congregation. I participated in the celebrations of various Chapters, Congresses, I visited the communities and I often met with laity and the women religious of our Passionist Family. There is vitality, dedication, ministry and accomplishments in the apostolic and social fields. And frequently there were many situations, in community and among the religious, of herosim and holiness, including heroes: positive elements that should not be minimalized or denied and for which we thank God. Positive elements mixed together with so many problems, inadequacies and difficulties common to the human reality. However if we believe that we can take steps to free and unify the multi-ethnicity of the Congregation on a world-wide level, together with all its richness, releasing and sharing the potential that the older provinces have, such as history, cultural patrimony, formation, tradition and the capability of organization including economically and contemporaneously, release the vitality, the youthfulness and the need and the thirst for a future in the youngest areas of the Congregation – then I believe that we can go even higher. It is the treasure in the Gospel of which Matthew speaks: “Then every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old.” (Mt. 13:52), new blood and old blood that mutually strengthen each other, united and realized within the one and the same charism.

Presently we are an international
Congregation which, however, only lives out and works within this international dimension during formal events such as General Chapters and Synods, cultural meetings and celebrations, which are important and significant events, but which are limited to time frames and in their capacity to have any bearing on concrete, living situations.

We are called, in recognition of the signs of the times that are so obvious, to think about and to plan toward a specific goal, a Congregation made new in its sense of its international dimension lived in common. This does not diminish the positive aspects of life in a particular locality or region; however our lives need to be lived as a Congregation more than as Provinces or Vicariates, that is, with mobility, flexibility and a general plan.

Consequently, restructuring is about the juridical structures that guide the Congregation, made up of those that are responsible for the ministry of directing and governing the General Council and the Provincial Councils. This includes the manner of planning and acting in the various areas of their lives such as formation, community and spiritual life, cultural and social commitments, the managing and economic sharing with reference to the Missions and to the poor. Presently our organization of Provinces, Vice-Provinces, Vicariates and missionary stations, although sharing the same charism are like many separated islands. We have bridges, roads, from one island to another, such as solidarity, canonical and pastoral visits, General Synods and Chapters, legislation, information and exchange of religious which, recently, has even received more emphasis, but we do not and we cannot plan long-term projects and common programs that respond to the various situations of the world and the different regions.

Every Province has to solve its own problems. We are involved with living everyday life and working to support ourselves while being conscious that we are inevitably destined for death. We even deny ourselves; talk about hope; but in various situations we act as if, in the depth of our hearts, we are heading toward exhaustion and death. No! The God of life invites us to break through the circle of isolation, to by-pass life, to realize the principle of physics of containers that are connected to point of becoming a single ocean of life and of apostolate in a globalized world. We believe in the God of life. Our presence here at this Synod is an act of faith in Him and of love for the Congregation.

At this point I think that it would be useful to make reference to some of the points in the Letter of convocation of this Synod.

The reduction of the number of religious and vocations in the Provinces of the western world and the development of the Congregation in Asia, Oceania, and Africa and also in areas of Latin America and the changing situations of the world as a result of the phenomenon of globalization, historically challenges us to at least address the topic of Restructuring. This is also one of the tasks assigned to us by the last General Chapter.

In fact, the renewal that originated in Vatican II has changed much of religious life both on a personal as well as on a community level, but is has left intact the structures of the Congregations. In a world that is ever more globalized and intercultural, with immigration trends from South to North and from East to West, we are still tied to structures that were put in place at the beginning of the last century.

During the last two decades the face of society and of the Church has profoundly changed, as has also the face of religious life. The world is more multi-ethnic, multi-racial and multi-religious.

The last General Chapter prophetically addressed the
The Chapter Document at #4.6 states: “‘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...solidarity calls us to a profound conversion of mind and heart. We grow in awareness that life is a gift to be shared.”

The time has arrived to create “a new way of being together” in the entire Congregation.

Restructuring for revitalization, restructuring to allow for a better flow of life from one part of the Congregation to another, “in one body and one spirit.” The time has come to open ourselves to the gift of life in order to offer the entire Congregation the gift of new life. In giving we preserve ourselves; by preserving ourselves and refusing to be open we are not capable of preserving ourselves, of living, and consequently, the horizon of the future is closed: “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it.” (Mk. 8:35)

The time has come to think more as a Congregation than as a Province, rediscovering the evangelical freshness and the capacity for dialogue among all the parts of the Congregation including an exchange of gifts among the various cultures and nations. Where there is authentic and sincere communication, there true communion takes place. It is necessary to enter into the “culture of the other” in order to understand his ideas, share his feelings, enter into his dreams. One of these dreams is that the Congregation might be transformed as if it were a single Province and as such live and be sent to all the ends of the world to announce the “Good News”. Jesus wishes us to be multicultural and multiethnic: “Go and teach all nations” (Mt. 28:19).

However in addition to asking ourselves, why Restructuring and arriving at the conclusion that it is inevitable to do so, it is necessary to ask ourselves and to discern which Restructuring is necessary today to revitalize the Congregation and to therefore be effective for the Mission. What kind of a Congregation do we want for the world of today with its secularization, violence, terrorism, its aggressiveness on a world and on a family level, which affect even the small, everyday aspects of life? There is much that originates in the Passion of Jesus and in the great human and Christian “values” as well as the inability to love and to be reconciled.

To combat the evils of our time and for the very vitality of the Congregation we ask: what kind of a Congregation would St. Paul of the Cross found today? And consequently, what kind of a Congregation would we envision for today; for the next ten years? What kind of community life? Which missions? Which future and how to bring it about and with what structures? We should avoid preconceived answers and restructuring as a solution that is predetermined. The kind of restructuring that is needed must be the result of a process of discernment that takes place within a process involving the entire Congregation. Therefore, we must ask ourselves how we can involve the Conferences, the Vicariates, the Provinces, the Vice-Provinces, the Vicariates, the communities, the Religious and even the Passionist Family. What criteria should be used for this discernment? What is the road that should be taken and what are the stages of the Process on the levels of the General Council, the Conferences and the Provincial Councils? It will be necessary to form “reflection groups”; conduct “viability” studies; arrive at consensus regarding concrete action steps for restructuring. In depth appreciation of these issues and of others will help us to discern the road to be taken.

We will be assisted in the process of understanding this topic of Restructuring by Luis García Sobrado, the Vicar General of the Marist...
Brothers, who will guide us as Moderator. In preparation for this Synod together with him, we have had several meetings as a General Council and as a secretariat. We thank him for his availability and his competency. His Congregation has already worked through a process of restructuring, although not completed, which has lasted close to eight years, and consequently he will share with us his experiences as well as those of other Congregations. He will help us to reflect and to discern: how to present the project of Restructuring to the religious; how to set the process in motion and how to deal with those who are resistant to the process.

I would like to share what Fr. Annibale Divizia, Sch.P. wrote in his report to the Union of Superiors General in November 2002 with regard to Restructuring.

“Another difficulty arises from the history of the Provinces that are involved in the process of restructuring. While this process would appear to be something easy to do for recently formed religious Provinces, can the same criteria be used for those that have a long historical tradition? The forces of resistance are endlessly multiplied, because other collateral areas of resistance are also at play: tradition, localism, the presence of institutes and works with a glorious tradition. To this is added the fact that many religious equate incardination in one’s own province as a priority with respect to membership in a religious Congregation. The province comes to be considered more like a Congregation in itself rather than a part of a Congregation. In these cases it is essential to establish times and modalities for restructuring.”

But he continues with hope, affirming: “an objective analysis of the situation convinces the religious about the necessity of going beyond the old, inadequate juridical structures of the past: the diminishing number of religious, their advanced age, the new organizational demands of our ministries, the lack of vocations, etc. are motives that are more than sufficient to convince us of the appropriateness of this kind of a process.”

We are aware that we must also address other difficulties and challenges that can enhance the capacity for inculturation such as openness in accepting differences, a knowledge of languages in order to facilitate the internal communication of the Congregation and for greater willingness to be assigned (and I believe that it would be good to decide during this Synod that our young religious learn three languages, including their own). Another challenge is that of being aware of the other person, whoever that might be, and to whatever religion he belongs; to have sense of what the other person is feeling. The master of this is the Crucified One. The above mentioned difficulties as well as others that we will have to address should not intimidate or impede us if we sincerely seek the Reign of God: twelve apostles, unlearned, fearful and contradictory, strengthened by the Holy Spirit, and transformed the world that was dominated by the powerful, pagan and hostile Roman empire.

It will be the chief task of the General Council and the Major Superiors, with the adequate instruments, processes and appropriate stages that will be proposed to us and which we will discuss, to support and to inform the religious and the laity of the Passionist Family.

Events, which we call Divine Providence, have directed the Congregation to celebrate the Synod during the time of Advent, actually beginning on the first Sunday of Advent. Advent is a time of watching and of waiting for
Him who is to come, for Him who will surely come. He is without beginning and without end, who was born in time and, if we have a humble heart, we can recognize the Child in the arms of his mother Mary. The Mission of Jesus, of Emmanuel, of the Prince of Peace, of the Son of God the Most High, and of God Himself, is a great Mission of light and blood. Visible in the simplicity and the fragility of a baby, he would be a great hope for all people.

I do not believe that the celebration of the Synod during the time of Advent in close proximity to Christmas is a mere coincidence; rather I believe that it is an urgent invitation to rebirth from on high. It is an opportunity that the Holy Spirit and the history of the world offer us, together with its problems of peace, of justice and of the loss of the meaning of life. We are called beforehand to leave behind the refuse of life and of history in order to sow seeds of hope.

The youth of the Congregation also have great hopes for this Synod. In the absence of any great plan of action, they are fearful of a future that is always more limited and difficult. Without great visions or dreams that impact upon community and apostolic life that is often difficult and without motivation, young people quickly lose enthusiasm and frequently leave the Congregation. These are the concerns and the open and painful wounds of several provinces.

It is imperative to rediscover the meaning of religious life and of vocation: why should I become a Passionist? Why should I continue to be one? Redesigning and discovering new visions for our religious life and opening new horizons with new points of reference will permit us to more easily overcome fragmentation within the provinces and stratification due to problems that in the long run become unsolvable and which suffocate life in community, thereby discouraging the youth.

We are watchful, but not pessimistic. If we work hard and not waste time our future will be less unsure and more enlightened and give greater and more meaningful witness. The most radical witness and preaching, clearer and shared, for all people especially the “crucified”, will also increase our ability to enliven young people and to attract them to our life.

Before concluding I wish to thank the religious and all of you, including the monasteries and the laity of the Passionist Family for their prayers and their human and fraternal concern at the time of my surgery last September. A kind of Restructuring took place in my body: triple bypass heart surgery to resolve difficulties and blockages. The operation allowed the heart to function more efficiently and gave me a greater possibility for life and therefore permits greater efficiency and capacity for work. This is what we also want for the Congregation by means of Restructuring.

We entrust the Synod that we are celebrating to our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of Mexico, united with the rainbow of devotion to the Salus Populi Romani in St. Mary Major, where on 24/25 September 1721, St. Paul of the Cross, our Father, made the vow to live out and promote the Memory of the Passion of Jesus: the vow that qualifies us and identifies us in the Church and in the world.

This Synod is a time of grace for us and for the Congregation because we are gathered in the name of the Lord in order to discern his will as did Jesus in the Garden of Olives. Like Him we watch and pray: time given to the Lord in order to allow new things to come to birth. For the sake of Restructuring and this historic moment, let us not be found asleep or with heavy eyes, because He will come and as it was for the disciples in Gethsemane, he will say: “the hour has come...get up, let us go.” (Mk.14: 41-42). In the course of this Synod we are not alone because He will accompany us in doing the will of the Father: “Let us go!” Amen.

Rome, Sts. John and Paul
28 November 2004
First Sunday of Advent

Fr. Ottaviano D’Egidio, Superior General
These reflections come from my heart, after the first three days of the Synod, without a prepared text and only with a few notes for reference. Afterward, I would welcome any dialog and sharing about these points.

Being together is a great gift from the Lord. It is a time of grace during which the Lord can intimately speak to each of us and can also speak through our brother, because “where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst.” (Mt. 18:20).

Yes! We are gathered here at Sts. John and Paul in the name of the Lord. We are here in the name of God. And we are not here for ourselves alone; rather we are here together for several days as a service, to meet with one another – and why not? We are also here together to laugh, although we are here additionally because of other interlocutors, important individuals that give meaning and a reason for our being here.

The first of these is God. He has called us to a very specific mission. And we must be aware of this so that we do not devalue the gift that is in us or underestimate it. It is necessary to be conscious of the gift, humbly and perhaps with some concern, because it is about viewing ourselves from the perspective of God himself and one’s vocation. God has called us because He has seen the world and He has loved it and, as He sent his Son, He also sends us. He loved the world so much that He sent His only Son (Jn. 3:16) and He so loved the world that He inspired flesh and blood people like us, and like so many others with a vocation. He inspired us as His loving response to the world — a sign of love for all eternity. We have been called for the world, and certainly, also for our own sanctity; but, like Jesus, always at the service of salvation. We are part of the project of Jesus in a very specific way.

In fact our love cannot be generic nor can we love the world generically. We have been called by name, each of us, by our vocation and we were told: “You are sent on mission and you will have a specific work to carry out, with a specific spirituality, with a certain image, not like that of a Dominican, or a Marist or a Carmelite, as valuable as they are – no! You must immerse yourself in the instrument that is the Passion of Jesus and you must make it your own. You must recognize the Passion of Jesus in the world and work to alleviate suffering according to the mandate that I gave you. You must not do other things or have other objectives; your area of competence, your charism, i.e. the gift that I have given you is this one. St. Paul of the Cross, our Father, said ‘my school is at the foot of the Cross; the Cross has been my greatest teacher.’”

Our vocation and our ministry must be to be and to live within this dimension. We cannot try to save the world generically; rather, specifically, by means of our vocation that calls us to especially recognize those that suffer, the “crucified” of today’s world. We are called to be the Samaritan (cfr. Lk. 10:30-37) that stopped and had “compassion” and not to be the priest or the Levite that passed him by. Rather, we are called to be the Samaritan who stopped, “poured oil and wine on his wounds,
bandaged them...and cared for him.” We do this according to the specific mandate that the Lord has given to us. And if this is true, and we are convinced that it is true, and that God has called us and sent us with this objective and within which see ourselves and today’s world, we have to ask ourselves if the Congregation is faithful to its mission, if it is alive, if it is committed to its work, if each of our lamps is lighted (cfr. Mt. 25: 1-13). Are we perhaps like the foolish virgins who are not concerned about the future that will be longer in arriving than what we originally thought which we must illuminate if we want to be faithful to the vocation and the mandate that we received? We have this responsibility and the Synod owned it when it understood the signs of the times, when it understood that the oil in the lamps was beginning to run out.

The world is experiencing a unique historical moment with various problems related to poverty, war, terrorism, etc. which cause us to ask ourselves: “Is our supply of oil sufficient? Are we responding adequately according to our lifestyle? Are we leavening in the mass of dough?” (Cfr. Mt. 13:33) This is what we must seriously ask ourselves today. It is a kind of examination of conscience to say: No, I can no longer continue like this; it is time to change the way of being together in order to adapt it to current historical situations and to the difficulties of the world. I want to be leavening within the mass of dough in a society that is multi-ethnic, multi-national, and trans-national coupled with a flow of persons that move from one continent to another. As a Congregation, are we prepared to respond to this difficult, including even the functioning of religious life itself. However, I have the impression that we are already aware of this need. The Synod is living out the topic of Restructuring very positively.

We are not ignoring the difficulties of restructuring and it is right not to hide them because this will not be a mere walk among daisies or in the Roman forum looking at beautiful ancient ruins. It will require work and there will be obstacles; there will be a desire for clarity, but at the beginning everything won’t be clear. In fact at the beginning there may be a lot of darkness. What happened to the blind man at Bethsaida (cfr. Mk. 8: 22-26) who was cured by Jesus may also happen to us. Usually the way that Jesus cured was immediate and complete, sometimes even with a single word and from a distance. However in the episode of the blind man at Bethsaida as told by Mark the evangelist there is something novel: “When they arrived at Bethsaida, they brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. Putting spittle on his eyes he laid his hands on him and asked, “Do you see anything?” Looking up he replied, “I see people looking like trees and walking…” i.e. he was not able to distinguish men from trees. It was a gradual miracle. Then finally, Jesus laid his hands on him again and he saw clearly and he was so completely healed that he was able to see everything, even from a distance. It seems to me that this miracle can help us to understand our situation: even if we see and we are convinced that we clearly see the road that we should travel, we don’t know how to do so; we don’t know what difficulties we will encounter. Perhaps the difficulties will seem to be more like trees than men, but then Jesus will surely come to our assistance and he will guide us on our path. There will be
the same life choices, if we choose life, that will urge us onward. We have no prior knowledge about the answers and the instructions regarding restructuring. These will come from the discernment process that will take place throughout the Congregation. Therefore I want to thank the Lord for the positive spirit that we are experiencing during this Synod, even despite the truthfulness, the difficulties, and at times, the challenges in trying to understand one another.

Another interlocutor, in addition to God and the world, are our brothers with whom we live on a daily basis and whom we know individually and collectively. We know their strong points and their weaknesses and they know ours and together we have to act upon them, even with different modalities and according to various cultures and realities. No one will be forced. It will be necessary to show respect toward everyone, especially toward the elderly who may experience fears and concerns as a result of the changes. Restructuring is not an order; rather it is a possibility, an opening of doors and something that is richly lived, not as an impoverishment or something that imprisons the heart. On the contrary, it is lived out in a spirit of mutual charity, above all charity toward our sick brothers. When I visited the Provinces, I saw the attention, the charity and also how much is justly spent for assistance toward our sick religious. It is a choice that should take priority, motivated by great love and by great human sensitivity.

And then there are the young. They are waiting for and want a new and different reality. They are awaiting real life and a future.

We, with the present juridical structures, are not able to free ourselves from these structures, even if we decide to do so in our Chapters. I believe that by carrying out restructuring on a global level of the Congregation it will be easier to modify the structures in those areas where it is deemed necessary and opportune. Today with the situations of the Provinces and Vicariates that are very localized and often with limited energy and potential, we are imprisoned by our hearts and feelings. In our Assemblies and Chapters, we can also make decisions about projects to be carried out, but in practice, it is as if we are paralyzed. In the process of general restructuring it will be more doable because there will be wider breadth of choices. There won’t be any affective attachments of the heart which at times, instead of being an asset it becomes an impediment, a limiting factor. I believe that we must go forward with faith and with hope because, despite the difficulties, we have great potential for doing great things.

The charism is strong and is present. We have a strong sense of identity, but we must courageously free ourselves from whatever hinders or impedes us. The Lord of life is with us and we cannot miss this historic moment. These are the final days and it is the final appeal “before the bridegroom arrives” and closes the door. In the parable that was read today, the groom says to the wise and the foolish virgins: “I don’t know you”, even though they were waiting for him and he knew that they were there, waiting for him. It is a phrase that has always touched me because it also coincides with what we read in Matthew’s gospel: “Not everyone who cries, ‘Lord, Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” (Mt. 7: 21-27.) And he continues with the powerful words: “…and on that day many will say to me: Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and we cast out demons in your name and did miracles in your name.” I have been a Passionist for thirty, forty years; I entered the seminary when I was twelve years old, fifteen years old; I’ve lived almost my entire life in the monastery:
“However I will say to them ‘I don’t know you’”. Yet we will insist: “What do you mean? I prophesied, I taught, I preached missions, I cast out demons, and I even did miracles in your name!” — “I do not know you.” is a terrible and deeply disturbing response! To be with Him, to live in community one’s entire life, to live for Him and with Him through religious profession and then hear Him say: “I never knew you – I don’t know who you are.” Why? Where did we go wrong? Where are we going wrong?

The answer to these questions is found in the very words of Jesus: he will only recognize “the one who does the will of my Father.” And what does God ask of the Congregation today? What decisions must we make to do the will of the Father? This moment in history, the signs of the times, the situation of the world and our situation urgently invite us to live out the charism of the Passion in a decidedly more decisive and radical way. The witness of our life and our apostolate is not as incisive and forceful as the charism itself challenges us to be. Weakness can undermine choices and give birth to ineffective positions, with compromises and a kind of laid-back approach to religious life and the apostolate. It’s true, we have also made courageous decisions, but there aren’t many. We have a certain missionary presence and have made radical decisions, but they are not powerful enough to be visible and therefore, lack attractiveness. Regardless of this, if we courageously go forward with restructuring, even in the midst of difficulties, seizing the present moment, avoiding tension as far as possible and seeking the Reign of God, we will increase the capacity of our Congregation to realize the vocation to which the Church has called it.

We should not be afraid to change our structures, even on a juridical level. The constitution of the Provinces, as a juridical entity appeared in 1769: for over two centuries we have had this structure. Let us not forget that St. Paul of the Cross changed the Rule even up to a few months prior to his death. The first approved Rule appeared 1741 and in 1746 there were additions and modifications. In 1769 the new Rule was approved and then in 1775, despite his advanced age and several months prior to his death, St. Paul had the courage to change and to modify the preceding situations. Therefore, what is there to fear? What apprehensions are there? We are the descendants of those changes. Then others appeared. In the General Chapter of 1982 the new Constitutions were written and they were subsequently approved by the Holy See on 2 March 1984, the day of the Solemn Commemoration of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We can add a new impetus and a new energy to the Congregation. Therefore, I say to you and to myself: Let us go forward, even if we cannot see clearly, because the Lord wants us to proceed in this direction; the Lord wills it. He wants the Passionists on the road toward restructuring. Let us place any apprehensions that we have at the foot of the Cross, as did St. Paul of the Cross. Let us believe that the Lord is in the boat with us to cross over to the other shore.

May the Lord help us along the road toward restructuring. May he enlighten us and grant us a positive attitude as well as to our brothers and also to the laity of the Passionist Family who similarly have a part in this process. Today their participation is not only important, but it is also essential for our life and for our future. We cannot avoid traveling with them because they, too, are part of our vocation.

May St. Paul of the Cross, our Father, bless us and may the Lord accompany us on the road toward Emmaus (cfr. Lk. 24: 13-35). Amen.

Sts. John and Paul, Rome
1 December 2004
THE REFLECTION OF VARIOUS PROVINCIALS
AFTER FR. OTTAVIANO’S PRESENTATION

After a period of silence in the Aula, the following reflection and reactions were expressed in response to General’s meditation which had just been delivered. Every paragraph is a spontaneous statement on the part of one of the Synod participants.

“I am excited about this beginning, this exodus. It is hopeful. I am happy to be a part of this process. It throws light on the future and allows the congregation to free itself in the service of God and the needy for life.”

“I thank Ottaviano for the spirit he shared with us. He follows in the steps of Paul of the Cross. I thank him for the leadership and sensitivity he shows for all religious. This does not mean throwing the past away, but treasuring patrimony and using it as light for the Church. I thank him for helping us to do the will of God and helping us provincials do the same.”

“I hear the words of the General who has put us face to face with our charism. I thank him for this as it fills our life. Our charism is our greatest treasure; there is richness in our charism and in our provinces. I recall Jesus meeting Nicodemus and challenging him to be reborn. There is a temptation for us to return to the womb of our congregation; but the wind of the spirit is calling us to use the force of the charism in a new way. I believe the synod is truly historic in a paschal way; we are being reborn. I am thankful to be a part of the family and charism that will carry us forward.”

“Thank you Lord for allowing me to hear the profession of faith of Fr. Ottaviano. It stirs in me the conviction that you are the Lord of my life, of my vocation, of this congregation. He calls us to this life, to this congregation. Thank you for helping us to find the pathways of renovation of our congregation, with the poor, with the most forgotten in society so that we may be witnesses of your love in this world. Thank you Lord.”

“Often we are people of our time. And, we would like results to be of our time. When we want the journey to be our end, we look for security and leave our faith aside. To believe with all the blessings God gives, we still abandon him so easily. Self sufficiency does not let us see beyond our selves. We need to believe very much in those people who are not here with us and who, frankly, have put their faith in each one of us. They trust and have such great hope. Not that we will come home with many answers, but that we will undertake this journey of dialogue and make our own the call that each of us has from God, even greater yet. I can say that we all need to ask God, who we so strongly believe in, to build up our faith.”

“We are grateful for this opportunity to change and reflect together on the restructuring of our congregation. The exchanges have been rich and have brought us to a common place where we want to be for restructuring to come about. Certain things, structures, can not easily be removed. We in the Congo see some structures as confining us. This is a moment of grace for us in the Congo; we are preparing to become a vice province. The General’s prayer gives us
courage. This event comes at a good time for the Congolese vice province that is about to be born. I thank everyone here who has taken part in this reflection.”

“At this time one feels a particular emotion, especially after participating in so many international meetings. Few here have attended so many. When Ottaviano spoke, I hear the echo of history. When we heard of the passage of the Passover, it reminded me of the work of 1982 on the Constitution; it was an enormous work; there was fear we would lose ourselves in the formalities. The moderator asked at that time, what is the symbol or word that best reflects the life this congregation is meant to live. Someone responded: this moment is the moment of the pasch, an exodus moment, a paschal moment. This is the same. This congregation has not renounced life and knows life is a movement. If something ceases to go forward, it ceases to live. The answer in every place and situation will be different; it is important to listen. Someone referred to the creed of the Passionists, and we need to recite that creed and add “and now me”. I believe the meaning of this synod is a conviction to the “me” now, and finding life for all.”

“I feel the theme of this synod is not just a theme but THE theme. It has touched us deeply. It generates a passion for our life, invites us to recreate life. The olive tree is our symbol here; we have gathered many fruits; now the time has come to fertilize the soil, sow new seeds so we can continue to gather delicious, savoury fruits for the world. I hear the Lord’s words that if he does not build the house, then in vain do the builders work. I believe in the God who is the God of the pasch and of the resurrection.”

“Let something from Nazareth come into our hearts and help us set aside the desire to live for ourselves.”

“I want to give thanks to God for the thankfulness I feel. The exhortation to walk with Christ invites us to look for new structures, and this is what we are doing. We are encouraged to take this message home; only if we are convinced can we convince others. Never should we be afraid to limit our steps or our vision. St. Ignatius said: in difficult times, we must change. We too must move on and change. Our charism, Christ crucified, is the goal. The means should always be at the service of the end. We are not going to encounter any obstacle that God has not already overcome. Let us live with newness, evangelical newness, this moment. It is a time of changing of structures, not just in our communities, but in finances, our communities, our relationships, in so many things. We cannot be frightened. Our strength is in him who loved us; this does not depend on us. Our responsibility is pure gratitude; we must be grateful, and share in a way that disposes people to be led by the Lord.”

“I found myself reflecting on the image of the olive. Perhaps a wonderful symbol of restructuring: there is the planting, the nurturing, the harvesting, the repeated pressing, crushing. All this happens if we are to produce the oil. The oil is used by the Good Samaritan, for lamps, for light, for proclamation. We cannot be effective Passionists in our world unless we nourish the source of the oil. We have a wonderful opportunity in these next two years; conversa-
tions can be a preparation for the Chapter, but also a model of restructuring in itself. The way we meet and talk can be a symbol of what we want to become."

“I have been a Passionist for 14 years, but this is my first international meeting. At first I was tense, but slowly I see the way the spirit of the Lord moves in this group. I am beginning to understand the meaning of restructuring. I am new to Passionist life on this level. I look forward to seeing many changes and much fruit. I have some worries, but I look for the product of what we are beginning now. I am eager to be one of the persons to benefit from this Synod. I pray again that the Lord will continue to fill us with his spirit and I pray for the General Council which will take much of the responsibility. It will be a kind of cross.”

“During Morning Prayer, I was hoping we would be led to a mountain of rich foods and choice wines. And we have been. We are on a journey of hope. Much has to do with trust. At a meeting in California, I told the men at the meeting that in my own spiritual life my well was running dry and that I needed to go to a new well or find a new source of inspiration. In administration, one solves problems and has answers; sometimes it is good to be in a place where we have questions and are able to ask them, and to trust our own integrity and of one another and however the spirit chooses to speak. I have hope. It may lead us to a certain kind of poverty, with the poor and within our selves. And, maybe a new kind of freedom asking what really is community life, who are the poor, who are the crucified. The season of Advent is hopeful and full of promise. I feel privileged to be here and sit at a new well.”

“A teacher of mine said that humans are the only creatures who speak of being tired or fatigued; sometimes there is competition over this. Nature does not experience this; things continue. We build so many structures; we weary ourselves in our own

*Synod members in small group discussion*

*Three Provinceals of the Synod*
heads. The point is we know who we are; all of us in this room have a challenge before us to live the vocation given to us. This really is a simple thing and we do not have to trouble ourselves in that way.”

“Listening to all of this and searching my own heart and feelings, I am reminded of a poster: now that I know all the answers, you have changed all the questions. Coming from a new foundation in the Congregation, I can appreciate the older provinces and entities and how hard they have built and worked. It may seem that it is different than what it was originally built for. The realities have changed. The Filipino community is new and full of hope; it encourages me to believe and continue to believe in the providence of God which will always guide us. I came here early to see other aspects of our life and I have been enhanced in my knowledge of how Passionists work in the world. I came here with problems and thoughts; we have deaths and difficulties in the Philippines but despite all these worries, I am seeing a change in myself in my attitude and mentality. I felt a stranger at first, now I am feeling at home and deep friendship with men here. Now that I know you and am hearing the depths of your convictions and faith, I will miss this group as I am not eligible for re-election next year. I was in Ireland and was the only one from the third world, then Brazil, Korea and now here I have accumulated wonderful knowledge about the congregation. The distance of the Philippines causes us to develop a particular Passionist way. But we have the same concerns: the poor, the environment, respect for the Church and the hierarchy and of course respect for St. Paul of the Cross. The sharing is personal and theological. I hope to do my best to share this experience with the brethren and enkindle in them the spirit of what happens here. I thank everyone for this.”

“The language is difficult. Being Japanese, I feel like a stranger. We are not well informed about the things of the congregation. We have small numbers and our men are young and not formed in the same sense of Passionist life. This synod gives us an opportunity to be open to the congregation, to learn and to experience the spirit of the community. I feel isolated, but people have been very kind; thank you very much.”

The prayer ended with the singing of “Laudate Dominum, omnes gentes, alleluia”
PASSIONISTS INTERNATIONAL:
AN UPDATE

Fr. Kevin Dance, C.P.

In the spirit of our General Chapter which called us to find other places in which to proclaim our ‘passion for life’, I am able to report that positive progress is being made in promoting Passionist concerns about justice, peace and the integrity of creation (JPIC) at the UN.

To help you understand my work in representing the Passionist Family at the UN, here is a summary of the activities I am presently involved in.

The Congregation of the Passion was accredited with the Department of Public Information (DPI) of the UN in December 2003. This allows me to attend Briefings, to benefit from the information resources of the UN and to share this information with our members round the world. To engage fully with the UN we must gain ‘Consultative Status’ through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Our Brazil Chapter foresaw our presence within the international forum of the United Nations as able to represent the whole Passionist Family.

I attended the Human Rights Commission in Geneva in March 2004, the Parliament of World Religions in Barcelona in May 2004. Involved as part of the Steering Committee to plan the UN conference in support of the Palestinian people in September 2004.

I have made JPIC presentations to many groups of religious visiting the UN.

The largest part of my time is devoted to working with a number of NGO Committees that meet regularly and follow the work of the governments in the UN.


Creation of Passionists International

In April 2004 a new ‘not for profit’ body was incorporated. It hopes to represent the whole Passionist Family, not just our Congregation, at the UN. It is called Passionists International and aims to bring our Passionist perspective to the critical issues of justice for all, peace in the world and care for and protection of our material creation. To gain consultative status with ECOSOC, a body must exist for 2 years. So during 2005 I will prepare our application for ECOSOC Status.

The first meeting of the Board of Trustees of Passionists International took place at Jamaica NY in the last week of November 2004. I am excited that the Board consists of male and female, lay and religious Passionists.
Webpage for Passionists International

A Passionists International Webpage has been launched to promote the flow of communication across the Passionist Family. It is trilingual – Spanish, Italian, English. We hope to feature thumbnail sketches of Passionist men and women working at the cutting edge of activities in JPIC around the world. We need to meet each other! The Page will be used to share information on the UN’s efforts to improve life throughout the world. As well, we need information about the concerns of Passionists ‘from the ground’ to feed into the interactions at the UN. We hope that you will become familiar with www.passionistworld.org Our Passionist Charism that reminds the world of God’s inclusive and healing love needs to be heard at the UN.

Networking

I believe the way ahead in our interconnected world is through more effective dialogue, networking and communication. I happily accept all invitations to meet with Passionist Major Superiors at Regional level. So far I have taken part in meetings of the PASPAC Region, North Europe Region and the North American Region of Mexico and USA. I am part of our Commission for Mission, Solidarity and JPIC. This helps me to keep a global perspective in my ministry at the UN.

I look for every opportunity to work in partnership with other Religious at the UN, with people of other faiths who share a common vision for justice and peace, and with government representatives open to our concerns and hopes.

I thank those of you who have expressed support for this new venture. If you have questions or suggestions I am very happy to hear from you. I ask for your prayers that this ministry may be infused with Jesus’ own Passion for Life in a hurting world.

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Fr. Kevin Dance, (SPIR)
ELEVATION OF THE SALV VICARIATE (Congo) TO THE STATUS OF VICE-PROVINCE

During the second centenary of the Congregation in 1920, the General Chapter made a recommendation to the Provinces of that time, to also extend the Congregation to other regions, especially those not yet Christian. The general Chapter of 1925, in response to the missionary appeal made by Pope Pius XI, made an additional request for the missionary apostolate among non-Catholics.

The Province of St. Gabriel in Belgium heeded this appeal and had wanted to begin ministry in the missions in the Congo since 1924. However on 22 March 1924, the Province of the Mother of Holy Hope was established in Holland and the superiors felt that it would be prudent to first build up the Province that was left only with houses in Belgium.

The superiors of the GABR Province spoke of the project of the missions during the Provincial Chapter of 1929 which approved giving the Provincial a mandate to study the possibility of a mission. The communications with the missionaries of Scheut, who were responsible for a large portion of the Congo, revealed the possibility of receiving a part of their territory in order to dedicate themselves to apostolic ministry. In light of this situation, the Provincial requested permission from the General. The General Consulta of 29-30 October 1930 "voted in favor of initiating the process with the Congregation of Propaganda Fide and with the Apostolic Vicar of the Missions."

On 13 October 1930 the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide gave its approval to the conditions proposed by Bishop Augusto DeClerck, the Apostolic Vicar of Upper Kasai, for the cessation of land to the Passionists in the district of the region of the
tribe of the Batetelas, with the possibility that, after six years, the area given to the Passionists would be separated and would be erected autonomously.

The Prefect of the Propaganda Fide, on 7 November 1930, not only gave approbation but praised and encouraged the decision.

On 18 December 1930 the first two missionaries, Fr. Giorgio Joye and Fr. Benedetto Weetjens departed for the Congo and spent two months with the religious of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Tshumbe in order to familiarize themselves with the customs, the pastoral practices and the language. On 4 July 1931, Bishop De Clerck sent two Passionists to Ifuta to open a new missionary station. Meanwhile, on 20 October 1931, an additional two religious departed from Belgium for the missions and then, almost every succeeding year, other missionaries went to reinforce the mission. On 28 December 1934 also Fr. Eusebio Hagendorens departed for the missions in the role of superior of the mission.

Eventually the Di Scheut Fathers ceded to the Passionists the missionary stations of Lodja, Katabo-Kombe, and Tshumbe Lubefu. The area assigned to the Passionists was declared an Apostolic Prefecture and Fr. Euseio Hagendorens was named the first Apostolic Prefect. The missionaries gradually established nine stations: Bena-Dibele, Okolo, Oemjadi, Kiomi, and Yenga.

On 13 March 1947, the Prefecture was raised to an Apostolic Vicariate and Bishop Hagendorens was consecrated bishop and the first Apostolic Vicar.

During the first thirty years our Passionist presence was limited to the Apostolic Vicariate of Tshumbe which became a diocese on 10 November 1939. At this point the mission consisted of 11 primary stations and 45 secondary stations where 36 Passionist priests and 11 Brothers ministered together with Bishop Hagendorens, in addition to several Brothers of the congregation founded by the Bishop and 8 indigenous diocesan priests. At the time of the independence of the Congo from Belgium and following the death of Lumumba, several problems developed that were both difficult and tragic.

In 1964 the internal fighting of the rebels with the central government resumed and the mission suffered significant damages and the missionaries and the sisters were exposed to many dangers. Frs. Raimondo Halkett and Lamberto Lanssen were murdered on 23 October 1964.

The Congregation began to expand beyond the initial missionary zone and in 1964 it entered Kinshasha and then in 1983, Lumbi. In 1970 Passionist vocation ministry was begun while the Bishop of Tshumbe tried to form the indigenous clergy and religious by creating a diocesan congregation.

In 1980 the first candidates for Passionist life were accepted and in 1982 the Regional Vicariate of Christ the Savior was erected. The Vicariate was directed to try to establish economic self-sufficiency at least for everyday expenses. In 1986 the Provincial Chapter established a fund for formation in the Vicariate and in 1989 the Province and the Vicariate began the joint endeavor of the Kisima African Theologate Project in Nairobi.

Since 1998 the Province, together with the Vicariate, has worked to prepare for the elevation of the Vice Province by means of meetings and ad hoc commissions. From these meetings has emerged the commitment on the part of the Province to continue to seek out means of economic assistance, as well as the dedication of the Vice Province to continue to be faithful to the charism and to the Passionist mission. The Vice-Province numbers 60 religious in 10 communities: Kinshasa-Limete, Kinshasa-Ksangani, Kinshasa-Binzia, Kinshasa-St. Christophe, Kinshas-Makanza, Lumbi-Paroisse,
Lumbi-Noviciat, Lodja, Ototo, and Lovo. Thus, considering the development of the Vicariate I proclaim the Decree of elevation to a Vice-Province.

THE DECREES

By the authority given me by our Constitutions (No. 104), and in agreement with the major Superiors Fr. Frans Damen, Provincial Superior of the Province of St. Gabriel and of Fr. Elie Muakasa, the Regional Vicar of the Vicariate of the Most Holy Savior, together with their respective councils; and with the unanimous consent of my Council, I elevate and constitute the Vicariate of the Most Holy Savior in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the Vice Province of the Most Holy Savior; and also (with the consensus of my Council) I confirm, until the end of his present mandate, Fr. Elie Muakasa in the office of Vice-

Provincial and Frs. Czelaw Duda, Martin Fripont, Prosper Kuakasa and Richard Monsemvula respectively in the office of Consultants of the Vice-Province.

May the Lord, through the intercession of Mary most holy, patroness of our Congregation, and St. Paul of the Cross, our Father and Founder, the Blessed Congolese martyrs, Blessed Isidore Bakandja and Maria Clementine Annuarite and the Saints and Beati of the Passionist Family, bless this part of the Congregation, so that, in fraternal communion with the African Conference, they may continue to grow and to give witness with their lives and with their words to "the greatest and most overwhelming work of God’s Love": Christ Crucified and Risen.

I trust that the present religious that comprise the Vice-Province will continue the apostolic endeavor of the Passionist religious who exerted such great effort to establish the Catholic Church, to make the Congregation flourish and to prepare for this glorious day.

The religious who have preceded us since 1930, left their families and country in a spirit of generous fidelity to Christ, in order to zealously cooperate with the saving action of Christ for all people. Two of them gave their very lives. All of them have made great sacrifices to travel, some of them by foot, during the early years so that people might come to know Christ the Savior. By means of their austere life, the missionaries, together with the help that the Belgian Catholics sent them, despite the financial difficulties of the country, were able to build schools, health-care clinics, and other charitable works for the benefit of the people and also their own homes and churches. It is my wish that the present and future religious will all keep Christ the Savior in the primary place of importance in their lives. Out of love for him, may they know how to avoid whatever would create an obstacle for community and apostolic life and thereby be able to dedicate themselves totally to the mission of evangelization. Following the example of the early Christian communities, may they live soberly, poorly and in a spirit of sharing, placing their talents and whatever they earn by means of their own work at the service of the community so that they may possess what is necessary for living, for the apostolate, for their material needs and also to be able to help the poor.

Rome, 6 December 2004
Retreat of Sts. John and Paul

2 Decrees and recommendations, cit. decr. No. 650.
3 AGCP, General Consultas 1925-1946, f. 77.
4 Acta XXII. 1961-63, p.29
Brother Luis García Sobrado, Vicar General of the Congregation of the Marist Brothers, facilitated the work of our XII General Synod concerning the topic of the Re-structuring of the Congregation. Bro. Luis was given this task of moderating the Synod because of his vast experience in this field in his own Congregation.

On the occasion of our General Synod, the PIB proposed several questions to Bro. Luis with regard to the process that is beginning in our Religious Family and which he is facilitating.

1. Bro. Luis, thank you for accepting our invitation to summarize your experience and your personal reflections concerning this process that we Passionists are initiating. Would you briefly comment on your work over the years in this area of Re-structuring?

My experience of restructuring began during the period of my formation with the Marist Brothers in 1959. That year the Marist province to which I belonged was divided in two and consequently we students were assigned to one of the two provinces. That restructuring had a great impact on us and it produced concrete consequences on our life as well as on our mission. For example, the fact that I spent 23 years in Africa, from today’s perspective, could be attributed to the fact that I belonged to one of the provinces and not the other.

More recently, in 1993, the XIX General Chapter of the Marist Brothers asked the new General Council to do a viability study of the government structures and, as a result of this study, to decide upon a plan for restructuring the Institute according to the most appropriate criteria that would favor the vitality of the mission and the life of the Marists at the service of the evangelization of youth in our contemporary society. I was elected a member of the General Council and it was then that circumstances and the hand of God invited me to study the viability of governmental structures and to design and to facilitate the necessary processes in order to take concrete action steps toward restructuring.

Consequently, I was a member of various teams for the purpose of doing in-depth research of the processes for initiating the
studies regarding viability and restructuring in the different regions of the Marist Institute. My specific involvement in the processes and actions of restructuring was concentrated in the region of Africa and presently in the regions of Asia and the Pacific.

2. Brother, Restructuring is a process that various Orders and Congregations of the Church have undertaken. Can it be said that it involves a movement within religious life, which continues to gain momentum? In your opinion, to what is this process attributed?

I believe that this movement is due to the profound changes that are taking place in religious Institutes and which have much in common with the changes that are altering the way it is to be man and woman, the way of relating to each other, and the mode of being a religious, a Christian and Church in today’s world. There was a time when we Marists believed that by changing our community lifestyle, our style of prayer and utilizing the most advanced techniques in our apostolates, everything would be put in place and we could return to “living and working calmly and renewed.” After 40 years of trial we have discovered that all these changes are only the tip of the iceberg of in-depth transformations that God is asking us to make at this point in our history. I believe that in one way or another we religious institutes are going through this process of consciousness raising to bring about a “certain awareness.” The common conclusion is the increasing perception of many of these Institutes that, in order to nourish the vitality of our charism, of our life and mission, it is not sufficient to “be good”; we also have to transform our structures, our image, our way of being the presence of Jesus in today’s world. In short, we have to move away from forms of presence and of ministry that were rooted in the 19th century so as to be able to function as a religious Institute of the 21st century.

Allow me to highlight some of these transformations as examples:

We are moving from an Institute composed of the majority of its members from the “North”, to an Institute drawing the majority of its members from the “South”, along with all the practical considerations that this reality entails for the vision and the living out of our charisms, of our mission and our way of making community and relating to one another, as well as the implications of functioning on the economic level.

We are moving from Institutes with a perception of mission “ad gentes” aimed at the “South” to Institutes with a growing awareness of a new “global evangelization”: to all people everywhere on behalf of all people everywhere. I believe that Redemptoris Missio as well as the studies of cultural anthropology are making us more aware of the need for a multicultural and international mindset with regard to the evangelization of all emerging cultures and cultures that are evolving in massive convulsions caused by the earthquakes of globalization.

We are moving beyond Institutes organized to encourage and be present to consecrated religious, with stable and familiar cultural elements...
traditions, toward Institutes whose charisms are becoming greater sources of life for the laity and for generations without Christian or Catholic cultural roots, and who, nevertheless, are profoundly and urgently in need of our mysticism and our spirituality. I am certain you can add your own examples.

The historical moment in which we are living offers opportunities for recreating and empowering the life as well as the mission of our Institutes. However, I believe that this will not occur spontaneously. In-depth reflection, as well as humble and courageous discernment is needed in order to be able to make institutional decisions that are capable of facilitating this new way of being a Passionist, Marist, Jesuit, etc. in the 21st century.

3. Brother, the process of restructuring has been going on in your Congregation for a number of years. What have you learned from this experience?

I believe that the main experience of all of these years of restructuring has been the power of the spirituality of a religious Institute: the on-going conviction that the charism of a congregation is a precious gift for today’s world.

A second experience is that of the power of fraternity. Many of our older brothers felt that it was better for them “not to get involved with this mess of restructuring”. However after prayer and reflection, many also decided to fully collaborate with the process so as to offer to the young brothers and to future generations a context for better living out the mission and the charism that was entrusted to them. Finally, the love of the brothers was stronger than human prudence. And, in a decisive way, this same sense of fraternity is helping to overcome the difficulties of allowing the new forms and structures to mature.

A third lesson that I learned during these years consists in realizing the importance of involving all of the brothers and a good number of the laity in the process: the importance of each individual feeling that he has been heard and consulted. Ideally, the process of restructuring should open new opportunities for experiencing fraternal communion.

Finally, a fourth conclusion that I would draw from this experience is the importance of the support and the collaboration of those in positions of responsibility in the Provinces as well as in the Vice-provinces and Vicariates. By this I mean not only the provincial superiors, but also their councils. Without the support of all of them it would be very difficult for the process of restructuring to function satisfactorily.

4. Let’s go to the Passionists. You were called by our General Curia to facilitate this process during the initial or introductory phase. We would like to know your opinion about what this experience with our Congregation was like for you; in particular, what you think about this recently concluded Synod and the topic of restructuring.
First, let me clarify that the General Curia of the Passionists invited our Superior General, Brother Sean Sammon. Without a doubt, he would have been the ideal person to assist you in your study and initiation of the process during the Synod. Nevertheless, and understandably so, as the Superior General, he realized that he could not afford you all the time and energy that the process of facilitation would require. Therefore he asked me to help you. I very willingly undertook the work, while being very conscious of my limitations; and I say this in all honesty. I hope that my poor assistance has in some way benefited the sons of St. Paul of the Cross to enable you not only to contemplate the Crucified One and the crucified of today with love and compassion, but that they can also be seen and recognized with joy and hope.

My initial experience in moderating this XII Passionist Synod has, above all, been that of encountering a rich, profound spirituality: your spirituality. Without realizing it, I had first encountered this spirituality during the summers of my childhood in a town of Galicia called Melide, where my maternal grandparents lived. On Sundays and holidays my grandparents would take me to Pastoriza, to the monastery of the Passionists. My grandmother felt very close to your spirituality. She taught me a prayer that she called a Passionist prayer: “Lord Jesus let me want for everything, but not for you.” Afterward, on my own, I met the Passionists in Nairobi during the 80’s. However, I never forgot that prayer.

Secondly, I experienced numerous differences between the Passionists and the Marists: I realized that your Congregation has a long history, longer than the Marists; your Institute is a clerical Institute while we Marists are what used to be called a lay Institute; your charism has its roots in Italy,
whereas ours is rooted in French sensibilities and culture; the Marist mission is strongly centered in the education of youth; the Passionists have a more diversified sense of mission. All of this characterizes a way of being and working and it has enabled me to see even more clearly the importance of the fact that every process of restructuring occurs within the context of the charism and in the deepest being of every Institute. On various occasions the synod members observed that the process of Passionist restructuring cannot merely be a simple adaptation of the Marist process. And I completely agree.

In the third place, I am deeply grateful to have had the privilege of experiencing the life of your Institute by means of the simple and sincere camaraderie of your leaders.

5. Brother, in conclusion, Can you tell us something about the concrete steps that have been taken or that are occurring in the areas of organization, apostolate and charism in the process of Restructuring in your Congregation as well as in others?

Those that have participated in the processes of restructuring almost all agree that it is difficult to analyze the results before at least six years of the process have transpired since its commencement in a Province, Vice-province or Vicariate.

Although the Marist process of restructuring began in 1993, however the first provinces to be restructured began to function as such only five years ago. At any rate, I believe that several positive signs can be observed.

This process of restructuring has already created a wider, more multi-cultural and international vision among the brothers as well as among the laity. And this vision began to manifest itself in increased activity functioning in a network: in inter-provincial, inter-regional and inter-continental communication and collaboration. For example, the number of persons who are agreeing to work or expressing an interest in the possibility of giving several years of their lives in service in the missions and to live in other Continents or nations has increased at a notable rate. Furthermore, within the same provincial territory there is greater availability and greater willingness for change of assignment.

In the area of financial organization, the Provinces with greater resources are taking more significant steps toward the creation of funds to allow the Provinces of the “South” to function with greater autonomy and to assure the quality of formation of a growing number of aspirants, seminarians and young brothers.

In my meetings with the Provincial Councils of the Provinces that have undergone the process of restructuring for a longer period of time, Central-Western Europe and South Africa, the two Councils did not hesitate to affirm that the process and the consequent decisions regarding restructuring have renewed the communities and the educational and ministerial projects. It brought about initiatives that were not taken for some time and it would have been wrong not to have taken them.

Today I am convinced that the process of restructuring has been a grace from God for the Marist brothers.
Below are the Biblical texts which were used for the common prayer and meditation during the Synod.

**Mk.14: 32-42**
He advanced a little and fell to the ground and prayed that if it were possible the hour might pass by him; he said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will.”

**Mk.14:22-26**
While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, “Take it; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many... Then, after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

**Haggai 1:1-11**
Thus says the LORD of hosts: This people says: “Not now has the time come to rebuild the house of the LORD.”

**Romans 11: 11-24**
If the first fruits are holy, so is the whole batch of dough; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

**2 Kings 4: 1-7**
“This servant of yours has nothing in the house but a jug of oil,” she replied. “Go out,” he said, “borrow vessels from all your neighbors—as many empty vessels as you can... As they handed her the vessels, she would pour in oil. When all the vessels were filled, she said to her son, “Bring me another vessel.” “There is none left,” he answered her. And then the oil stopped.

**Lk 21: 29-37**
Consider the fig tree and all the other trees. When their buds burst open, you see for yourselves and know that summer is now near; in the same way, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.
Is 61: 1-4
They shall rebuild the ancient ruins, the former wastes they shall raise up and restore the ruined cities, desolate now for generations.

Mt 25: 1-13
Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise.

1 Kings 17: 7-16
For the LORD, the God of Israel, says, ‘The jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, until the day when the LORD sends rain upon the earth.’” She left and did as Elijah had said. She was able to eat for a year, and he and her son as well. The jar of flour did not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, as the LORD had foretold through Elijah.

Gen. 8: 6-12
In the evening the dove came back to him, and there in its bill was a plucked-off olive leaf! So Noah knew that the waters had lessened on the earth.

Acts 1: 12-14
Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. When they entered the city they went to the upper room where they were staying… All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

1 Sam. 16: 1-13
Then Samuel, with the horn of oil in hand, anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and from that day on, the spirit of the LORD rushed upon David.
The Opening Ceremony of the Synod
“Working Sessions of the Synod”
“Relaxation and Recreation”
“The Synod Liturgies”