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The 45th General Chapter of the Passionists – Rome, 2006

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OPEN TO THE SPIRIT FOR NEW LIFE:  
“A Chapter for Restructuring”

“We have invited Fr. Luis Enrique Bernal of the FID Vice-Province of Colombia to write the Introduction to this special Post-Chapter issue of the PIB. Fr. Luis Enrique is a former General Archivist and also former Editor of the PIB. During this Chapter he served as Spanish language interpreter”.

With this motto, 100 Passionists — a multicolored mosaic of languages, races and cultures — gathered in Rome from five continents during the first 22 days of October to celebrate the 45th General Chapter of the Congregation. The Generalate of Sts. John and Paul offered its usual fraternal and well-ordered welcome, offering them, in particular, the newly renovated Chapter Hall for their deliberations. Of this number, 85 religious were official capitulars, representing all of the provinces, vice-provinces and almost all of the vicariates of the Institute. A notable number of religious and laity were also assembled to serve the Chapter as secretaries, interpreters, translators, liturgists, as well as those who assisted with logistics — each having in mind the goal of facilitating this hope-filled event for the world-wide Passionist Family. For the first time in the history of the Congregation the entire Congregation was well represented.

Certainly each of the participants in this Chapter carried back to his community his own impressions and conclusions and surely these varied widely. For many it was a first experience of an event of this magnitude; while for others, it was another opportunity to lend a hand in the journey of Passionist life. The answer to the question concerning whether the Chapter achieved the expectations of the majority of the Capitulars varies from member to member. Probably many had hoped for more, especially in the area of the process of Restructuring to which the Congregation has been committed since 2004. This Chapter was the first important event that sought to affirm and to give the process future direction. Others capitulars were probably of the opinion that necessary and appropriate steps were taken to proceed with this newly initiated process in a careful and studied spirit. However, undoubtedly, everyone understood the importance of this gathering in being able to sustain this course of action.

The Restructuring Commission that was formed at the beginning of 2005, the Chapter Preparatory Commission that has been working throughout the past year, and the General Curia itself worked to program and coordinate this event both from the perspective of its content as well as its methodology. The moderator, a Norbertine religious, Fr. Ward Cortvriendt was entrusted with carrying out the methodology that was adopted, with its high points and low points, which a venture of this kind and magnitude requires.

The Chapter itself was centered on the topic of Restructuring and the search to discover the means of focusing the process within a universal context, which would subsequently have to be made specific in each region, nation and Passionist community. In order to achieve this goal, the Assembly tried to name priorities that would determine the need for such a process in the current life circumstances and ministry of the Congregation and, at the same time, prepare to assume responsibility for the same. Within this framework, the following areas were highlighted: formation, especially initial formation, and the formation of formation personnel; youth, in particular naming the “preferential option for the young”; dialog with the various cultures and religions of the
world; solidarity *ad intra* and *ad extra* the Congregation; development of the role of the Passionist laity and collaboration with them; strategic planning with regard to our governmental structures, emphasizing the qualities of leadership that are need-
ed for today’s Congregation.

Wanting to be a sign of Restructuring itself, the Chapter chose to modify the structure of the General Government changing from the usual six to four General Consultors. These would no longer be representatives of different Conferences and Regions; rather they would be part of a cohesive leadership team that would primarily be attentive to the process of Restructuring. With this in mind and in order to facilitate the process and to include the entire Congregation, the importance of the Regional Conferences was restated as ordinary though not exclusive settings for dialog. This dynamic should be helpful in the second phase of the process and should afford the Conferences some degree of authority which would enable them to give orientation to their development, and thereby create means of communication between the General Government and the Congregation at large. In this matter the Chapter did not take any decisive steps, choosing instead to give the newly elected General Curia the responsibility of enacting this decision.

Throughout the Chapter reference was made to the importance of unity in the midst of diversity. Realistically we cannot presume that all the various areas of the Congregation will adopt the same approach to the process because the needs, demands and methodologies are and continue to be very diverse. The charisma forms the indissoluble bond of unity in the Restructuring of the entire Congregation and its presence, embodied in different cultures and needs, is the guarantee of its fidelity to the transformation that is intrinsic in each reality.

The presentations that were delivered by the two guest speakers, the Spanish Dominican, Felícísimo Martínez and the American layman, Tim O’Brien, offered insight into the discernment process. The liturgical symbol, expressed in the Biblical element of the vine, was recalled in numerous ways and was enriched through songs and texts in the three official languages of the Chapter. It was woven into the various work sessions that were characterized by fraternal dialog that took place formally in the ten multi-language small group discussions or in Conference discussion groups. There were also many opportunities for informal dialog in the refectory or in the small circles that spontaneously devel-

oped during the breaks. Finally, dialog also assumed an official character during the plenary sessions in the Chapter Hall.

The various chapels of the house, especially the Chapel of St. Paul of the Cross, where his body resides, were the places of the daily celebrations of the Eucharist and morning and evening prayer according to the various language groups. Various homilists offered inspiring reflections during the three weeks, yet there was an overall theme: the desire for authenticity in Passionist life and for reflection on the everyday life of the communities throughout the world that need to be enlivened through the process of the Chapter – specifically, our fraternal lifestyle, community life, charismatic service to the suffering and attentiveness to the poor.

If one wanted to single out a distinguishing characteristic that the Congregation displayed through its leaders and representatives that were present at this gathering it would be the urgent need for Restructuring and the total dedication that is required to keep it on track, regardless of the difficulties that the Chapter itself experienced and, rather than inhibit the process, the difficulties served as a stimulus. There is still a long way to go; there are many obstacles yet to be overcome. However everyone seems to be in agreement about one thing: the Congregation must respond to the urgent needs of those who suffer amidst the evils that surround us and this response will determine the historical continuity of our Family – all of which will be colored by the process of Restructuring. =====

Brother Paul Kim Yong-Gwon and Fr. Joseph Oh Seong-Kyun of the MACOR Province of Korea in St. Peter’s Square.
EDITORS’ NOTE: Following are excerpts from the Report on the State of the Congregation which was delivered by the Superior General, Fr. Ottaviano D’Egidio during the recent General Chapter. The report in its entirety is available in printed form or on the website at www.passiochristi.org

45th PASSIONIST GENERAL CHAPTER
REPORT ON THE STATE OF THE CONGREGATION

ROME, 1-22 October, 2006
Greetings and Introduction

1. Dear Brothers and Sisters of our Passionist Family,

“Peace be with you!” This was the resurrected Jesus’ greeting to his disciples at his first apparition following on the bitter disappointment of the Passion Week which came to a head on the Good Friday with his death and was but confirmed by the empty silence of Holy Saturday, bereft of any promise. “Peace be with you!” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the holy Spirit." (Jn 20:19-22). May that same greeting of Jesus’ resound among us, religious of the Congregation and other members of the Passionist Family meeting in prayer for the Chapter: a greeting which becomes a true gift: “Peace be with you!” May he show us his hands and his side, signs of his Passion, not because of our disbelief as with St. Thomas, but rather to allow us to contemplate and proclaim this incredible love and to confirm that Jesus, the crucified son of Mary, yes!... Jesus of Nazareth, “the son of a carpenter,” is truly risen and we are now part with him, not only in his Passion but also in his Resurrection. May he breathe upon us and renew his gift of the Holy Spirit and thus open our minds and hearts so that we don’t remain, as did the disciples, with “the doors locked... for fear...” on this gracefilled occasion of life which is the General Chapter. “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” (Jn 20:21). This then is mission! This is the continually renewed sending forth of the Church and hence of us. This is the peace bestowed before sending us out, to be extended to the entire world, even when the world seems incapable of receiving it. We are, therefore, preparing to celebrate our next General Chapter, which will convene here in Rome during the coming month of October, in a world convulsed by conflict, wars, terrorism, death and the dread of death. Nations and those who govern them frequently appear to be incapable of acting and are paralyzed in their attempts to devise strategies for overcoming those conflicts which they themselves, either directly or indirectly have brought about. If we don’t come up with better values and principles with which to substantiate our getting along together, any solutions based on a balance of power and political agreements will likely be but transitory and ineffective.

The world will be saved when we recover our values and ethical principles. We have faith that this will come about notwithstanding the grave problems of our day, given that our Crucified and Resurrected Lord, who represents the maximum expression of all values, has forever triumphed over death. And it is our mission to proclaim this.

2. Our vocation in the world
It is frequently asked whether the structures of thought and ethics upon which our contemporary world relies are promoting growth, or whether they tend to favor rivalries, divisions and lack of communication, perhaps even putting our very survival at risk. There is an ever growing conviction that we need to change the way peoples relate to one another, promoting a respect for diversity, for justice, the ongoing search for peace, for mutual solidarity and, above all else, a spirit of charity and compassion, virtues which the dominant mentality of our day and age seems to despise and push to one side.

We are becoming ever more aware of the fact that unless we manage to break away from undue individualism, from the desire to be the leading light at all cost,
It is a matter of passing from theory to practice, from proclaiming the one mystery of salvation to sharing “in the distress of all, especially those who are poor and neglected” (Const. 3). It is in these that the Crucified Lord takes on a concrete name and calls us to share in his Passion. In these days I have received a letter from an elderly religious who for more than 60 years has been a missionary in Africa. In it he writes, referring to the document of the Commission on Restructuring, “Characteristics of our Passionist Charism,” that the attention we pay to the “crucified” of the world should spring from our contemplation of and the proclamation of “The Great Crucified One,” who came that we might have life – and especially divine life – in abundance. He suggests we should avoid the mistake of overlooking Him and quotes Blaise Pascal: “Jesus is in agony till the end of the world.” We would like to reassure him that He will not be forgotten.

It’s upon the Cross that one comes to understand the solidarity which exists between the Crucified Lord and the crucified in our midst, who with Him constitute a single mystery of salvation, for “his Passion and death are no mere historical events. They are ever-present realities to people in the world today, ‘crucified’ as they are by injustice, by the lack of a deep respect for human life, and by a hungry yearning for peace...” as our Constitutions remind us (Const. 65). The Lord leads us to understand ever more fully just how love for his Crucified self is arrived at through love of the crucified of this world. It then becomes possible to see, as did St. Paul of the Cross, “the name of Jesus written on the foreheads of the poor.”

The Cross of Jesus is firmly connected to every cross borne by suffering people today, and we Passionists cannot, because of our very vocation, forget this fact. Every human Calvary is therefore God’s Calvary and represents the furthermost frontier where, by reason of our calling, every Passionist is called to be present. There’s a pressing need to openly demonstrate to this society, so intent on do it yourself salvation, the enormity of suffering weighing upon humanity. And then we shall sense God’s own pain together with that of humanity and his solidarity with the same.

A new understanding of reality and the world is born in the Cross and it falls upon us to speak the same in broad daylight and “proclaim it from the housetops” (cf. Mt 10:27) as “a lamp... on a lamp stand, where it gives light to the whole house” (Mt 5:15).
EDITORS’ NOTE: The following segment entitled THE REALITY OF THE CONGREGATION IN THE VARIOUS REGIONS is a summary of the section of the original document entitled “Our Realty”. These excerpts were prepared by Fr. Luigi Vaninetti, General Consultor.

THE REALITY OF THE CONGREGATION IN THE VARIOUS REGIONS (As of August, 2006)

As of the month of August 2006, the total number of Passionist religious was 2,206. They are classified as follows:

Priests: 1679
Permanent deacons: 9
Brothers in Perpetual Vows: 202
Brothers in Temporary Vows: 26
Clerics with Perpetual Vows: 55
Clerics with Temporary Vows: 177
Novices - Brothers: 5
Novices - Clerics: 53

The Congregation is located in 58 countries and is composed of 24 Provinces, 5 Vice-Provinces, and 14 Vicariates. From the year 2000 until now, three new provinces have been established (FAT, PASS and MACOR), two Vice-Provinces (REPAc and SALV) and two new missions in Mozambique (2003) and Vietnam (2005).

There are 381 houses. Of these there are 90 communities composed of 1-2 religious, 156 composed of 3 to 5 religious and 118 have 6 or more religious per community and 17 have no communities.

The 90 communities composed of 1-2 religious are almost all mission stations; however a process is underway to address this present situation by rediscovering the community dimension.

THE CONGREGATION AND THE VARIOUS CONFERENCES (as of August 2006)

CII (Iberian Interprovincial Conference)
CII is composed of 228 religious who reside within the territory, having a median age of 64. There are six religious who live outside of community. It comprises two countries (Spain and Portugal) and four Provinces. It has 28 houses of which two have 1-2 religious, eight have 3-5 religious and 18 have six or more religious. Additionally, 232 religious of this conference live and minister in Latin America (COPAL) and 2 in Angola (CPA).

CPI (The Interprovincial Conference of Italian Passionists)
There are 475 religious that reside within the territory, having a median age of 62. There are 22 religious who live outside of community (15). They are located in the country of Italy and in Bulgaria. There are 70 houses of which seven are composed of 1-2 religious, 28 of 3-5 religious and 32 have 6 or more religious.

Additionally, there are 61 religious of CPI (approx. 13%) who minister outside of the Conference, specifically in COPAL (24 religious with a median age of 71); in CPA (18 religious with a median age of 66); in PASPAC (9 religious with a median age of 68); and in Bulgaria (5 religious with a median age of 62) as well as in other regions of the Congregation.

COPAL (The Conference of Passionists of Latin America)
There are 469 religious who reside in the territory with a median age of 50. There are 28 religious who live outside of community (18). They are located in the following countries: Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Dominican Rep., Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Venezuela, Columbia, Paraguay, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador and Panama. They are composed of 3 Provinces, 1 Vice-province and 8 Vicariates. Of note is that at the FAM Province provincial Chapter of 2005 the decision was made to suppress its Vicariates of Central and South America.
It has 99 houses or missionary stations of which there are 24 with 1-2 religious, 54 with 3-5 religious and 21 with 6 or more religious.

**CPA (The Conference of the Passionists of Africa)**

There are 144 religious that reside in the territory with a median age of 43. Of these 34 are from other Conferences of the Congregation (CIPI, NEPC and CII) and minister in Africa. There are 4 religious who live outside of community (3). They are located in 7 Nations: Kenya, Tanzania, Democratic Rep. of Congo, Angola, Botswana, Mozambique and South Africa. It consists of 1 Vice-province, 3 Vicariate and 2 Missions.

There are 38 houses or Missionary stations of which there are 18 with 1-2 religious, 13 with 3-5 religious and 5 with 6 or more religious.

**IPCM (The North American Conference)**

There are 248 religious that reside in the territory with a median age of 69 years. There are 35 religious who live outside of community (15). They reside in 2 countries: USA and Jamaica, West Indies and comprise two Provinces and one Vicariate.

There are 40 houses of which there are 13 communities with 1-2 religious, 13 communities with 3-5 religious and 12 communities with 6 or more religious.

**NEPC (North Europe Passionist Conference)**

There are 270 religious residing in the territory with a median age of 66. There are 44 Religious who live outside of community (24). They are located in 13 countries: Belgium, Czech Rep., Germany, England, France, Ireland, Holland, Austria, Poland, Scotland, Sweden, Ukraine and Wales; it is composed of 6 Provinces and 1 Viceprovince.

It has 43 houses of there are 12 Communities with 1-2 religious, 11 with 3-5 religious and 14 with 6 or more religious.

**PASPAC (Passionists of the Asia – Pacific Conference)**

PASPAC has 349 Religious residing in the territory with a median age of 43. There are 20 Religious who live outside of community (14). They are present in 10 countries: Australia, Papa New Guinea, China, India, Indonesia, the Holy Land, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea and Viet Nam. It is composed of 3 provinces, 2 Vice-provinces, 2 Vicariates and two missions.

It has 64 houses within which there are 14 communities of 1-2 religious, 29 communities of 3-5 and 16 of 6 or more religious.

**Conclusion**

It’s now two years since we started upon the road of Restructuring and we can confidently say that the road itself is already an achievement. We are experiencing an ever better capacity to dialogue about fundamental themes regarding our life and mission. Apart from replies to the questionnaires we have been receiving letters from various religious who write on specific points under discussion. They have shown enthusiasm and a desire to participate, an indispensable factor in the revitalization process underway. Yet this coinvolvement should become ever more common in order that the spirituality of communion may grow and to better undertake common projects. We need to carry on and go yet further.

Our dialogue won’t end with the Chapter; it will give rise to a second phase of dialogue which should lead the Congregation toward deciding upon operational and institutional options, and here we shall need not only personal conversions but also an institutional one. The Chapter road should decide upon operational guidelines or criteria which allow us to pinpoint and choose, with adequate steps and sufficient time, our new territorial entities and the dialogue zones which could include various countries and Provinces. The chosen model will then need to be proposed to the entire Congregation and to the different dialogue zones, so that, once the positive and negative aspects have been weighed and the “viability” duly verified, they may formulate their comments and suggestions.

To discern and determine new territorial areas does not mean any change in our charism, any loss of identity,
or historical, cultural and spiritual values of the Provinces, Vice Provinces or Vicariates, but rather puts them in communion and allows others to participate. It amounts to a sharing, from the very depths of our charism, in goods, and will be a means of avoiding their loss through the decline now going on in certain Provinces, thus allowing them to be shared with and cared for by the new and growing areas of the Congregation.

Just as happened with the other Congregations after they undertook and completed their restructuring, we too will need to give our new territorial Entities an adequate figure, studying some concrete matters such as the lack of a proper juridical status, and face up to the problems and due place of our aging Provinces, always respecting their autonomy. In point of fact, those Provinces whose members are for the most part growing quite old and which have dim prospects for the future, need special attention including, if necessary, particular statutes. The experience of other Congregations shows that it greatly helps these Provinces when it is possible for them to come up with new missionary projects, even when these won’t depend upon the Provinces themselves.

The new territorial Entities, born of the Restructuring process, should have their own Regulations governing their life and powers of decision, just as do the present Provinces, Vice Provinces and Vicariates, regulated by Provincial Regulations in harmony with the General Constitutions and Regulations of the Congregation and approved by the competent organization and authority. Obviously these modifications will merely be canonical and contained within our General Constitutions and Regulations; the Provinces, Vice provinces and Vicariates will remain intact and unchanged as juridical entities recognized by civil law in the various countries. One should add that an option for any model of a new territorial Entity will foresee and require an adequate study by the territorial and General government, in function of the model. Nevertheless the process will go ahead with adequate phases and time frames, thus allowing the Congregation to dialogue in order to arrive at operational options.

And as we strategically plan the future of the Congregation as a whole for the year 2012, we can even now set directions, albeit partial ones, favoring new styles of community and new forms of evangelization presence.

The youth sector, both within and without the Congregation, could well be an area in which to start an option for “the politics for life.” We should get a dialogue going with our younger members on the future of Passionist mission and community lifestyle which would be open to experimentation, even with new models. The results of a recent survey among young people, published last August, regarding those values which they held in highest regard, showed that 72.9% mentioned family and friendship, which would roughly correspond in our religious life to community and fraternity. A lot of the crisis among our religious can be attributed to shortcomings in this sector. Hence it behooves us to be particularly careful in our Provinces to get rid of those elements which impede communion and fraternity, such as the excessive zeal among younger men to engage in activities within the existing structures and to take on roles and ministries bereft of any horizon. During this transition phase the General government should pay special attention to the newer and growing areas of the Congregation, and those Provinces in a stronger economic position should increase their solidarity in order to sustain formation and other things necessary for their development. These and/or other considerations could be part of a “preferential option for youth.”

Furthermore the difficulties we experience in maintaining an ongoing contact with youth on the outside ought to impel us to be creative, supporting the different forms of youth ministry, and to show courage in opening up spaces for them in some of our houses. We could well share moments of prayer with them and we could involve them together with our own young religious in works of evangelization and in voluntary mission work with concrete experience in serving the poor. This could be a model of life which, while truly youth ministry
could also become vocation ministry. There are already youth groups and movements where we are present, such as “Tendopoli,” “Passionist Volunteers,” “Payo,” etc. These options in the field of youth could also be lived in collaboration between Provinces and Conferences of the Congregation.

My dear brothers and sisters of our Congregation and of the Passionist Family, in # 5.2 of the 2000 General Chapter Document, “Passionist Charism,” we read under Guidelines, “In every community, in communion with the Passionist family, we wish to live the next years as a Kairos, as a time of discernment of the Passionist charism. We wish to submit our style of life and our institutions to the purifying and creative breath of the spirit. To do so, we will study the history of our Congregation, the Constitutions and our traditions, in order to learn to reenunciate them with a creative fidelity.” And now we wish to put this into action through our Restructuring Process, yet we must flee three temptations which our experience during these first two years of the Process have made apparent. The first one is that of trying to find quick solutions and techniques without bothering to fathom the very roots of our consecrated being. This temptation of seeking shortcuts under the illusion of saving time only prolongs the invested time, as it comes up with superficial solutions and not infrequently causes one to lose sight of the road.

The second temptation is that of the prophet Elijah who, wishing to die, says, “This is enough, O Lord! Take my life...” (I Kg 19:4). This is the temptation of demoralization and throwing in the towel, of just drifting when confronted with a difficulty, old age, sickness, even life. It is only human that this should also occur within communities and in personal situations or those of a Province, and, at this particular time, with regard to the Congregation itself and the Restructuring Process. “...but then an angel touched him and ordered him to get up and eat. He looked and there at his head was a hearth cake and a jug of water. After he ate and drank, he lay down again, but the angel of the LORD came back a second time, touched him, and ordered, ‘Get up and eat, else the journey will be too long for you!’ He got up, ate and drank; then strengthened by that food he walked forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God, Horeb.” (I Kg 19:5-8).

Our road, as was Elijah’s, is at a level of faith and prophecy: keeping faith is in itself both mission and proclamation. This is comfort for the new generations united in prayer and in offering to God their own difficulties and suffering. On Mount Horeb Elijah discovered the Lord “not in the strong and heavy wind which was rending the mountains and crushing rocks,” nor “in the earthquake,” nor “in the fire,” but in “a tiny whispering sound.” God is not in the signs of force and power but in an almost imperceptible breeze. He has no need for the strength of our youth, perhaps distant today, nor for our cleverness, but rather for our compliance with his will: Jesus, at that moment when he was most weak and vulnerable, the moment of his death upon the Cross, is the highest expression of life in the Father’s will for salvation. And the Lord said to Elijah, “Go, take the road back to the desert...”.(I Kg 19:15). He’s inviting him not to run away, but to continue his mission.

The third temptation to be avoided is that of Zechariah or incredulity. It’s not believing that things will ever change, that new life can sprout. Luke’s Gospel in its first chapter tells us about the annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist. Zechariah the priest had a wife by the name of Elizabeth, and “Both were righteous in the eyes of God... but they had no child because Elizabeth was barren and both were advanced in years” (Lk 1:5-7). While Zechariah was serving as priest in the temple, “the angel of the Lord appeared to him... Zechariah was troubled by what he saw and fear came upon him. But
the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth...’” (Lk 1:12-14). But Zechariah, taken aback, didn’t believe, and said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.’ And the angel said to him in reply, ‘I am Gabriel... I was sent... to announce to you this good news. But now you will be speechless and unable to talk until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words...’" (Lk 1:18-20). Zechariah’s incredulity doesn’t change God’s plans. In fact he had prayed: “your prayer has been heard” and God had listened to his prayers even though they may have been repetitive, some what expressionless, and possibly, at the bottom of his heart, he never really believed that his prayers could ever bring about a change in old age and sterility. Perhaps at first, at the time of their youth, even if his wife were sterile, he might have believed that his prayer could in some way “facilitate” God’s intervention, but now... advanced in years as they were and her sterility worse than ever, this would have seemed like an insurmountable obstacle even for God. But God loves to operate at our direst moments when we are bereft of all human means, that his glory and benevolence may shine forth all the brighter. What should comfort us is the knowledge that our own incredulity is no barrier to God’s plans, just as boulders in the middle of a stream won’t stop it running. The birth of John the Baptist, apart from bringing joy and exultation to their home, gives back his voice to Zachariah, his father. The full return of life is an encouragement for us to believe.

I should like to invite all the religious of our Congregation and the entire Passionist Family to live, in faith and hope in a new life, the General Chapter event. Even if spread over 58 countries of the world in which the Congregation is established, next October we shall come together from the 1st to the 22nd as if in a huge Cenacle “all in one place together” (Acts 2:1) just as did the Apostles on the day of Pentecost when “they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues” (Acts 2:4). The crowd was amazed because they each heard them speak in their own tongue, and said, “Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his own native language? We are Parthians, Medes and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God.” (Acts 2:7-11). So too with the international and multicultural characteristics of our Congregation: these will become our communion rather than impediments to our understanding one another and sharing our life and projects so as to proclaim “the mighty acts of God,” those which for us Passionists are the greatest and most amazing: the Passion of Jesus.

Before concluding allow me to recognize and thank the General Consultors who, apart from being wonderful and united in the animation and governing of the Congregation, have collaborated in putting together this report, especially in their analysis of their respective Regional Conferences and the areas assigned to them. And as I repeat once again to all our men and women religious and lay people the greeting of the Resurrected Jesus with which I started this report, “Peace be with you!” my thoughts go warmly to all the aged and infirm of the Congregation and of our Passionist Family who are participating, in their concrete daily lives, in the Passion of Jesus.

May Mary, in whose Sorrows we venerate the Patron of our Congregation, whose Nativity we celebrate today and who represents for us an invitation to a new birth, protect our communities and families, just as she protected the house and hearth at Nazareth.

And may Saint Paul of the Cross, our Father, accompany us all. Amen.

"Next October we shall come together from the 1st to the 22nd as if in a huge Cenacle ‘all in one place’ as did the Apostles on the day of Pentecost."
V. Rev. Ottaviano D’Egidio, Superior General
Dear Brothers of the Congregation and the Passionist Family, Sisters and the faithful,

I welcome you and I also welcome you in the name of St. Paul of the Cross, our Father and Founder, whose body lies beneath the altar in the chapel on the right side of the Basilica. A warm, fraternal, joyful welcome because it is good to be together in the house of the Lord to glorify Him, to prayerfully discern his plans in silence and listening so that they can be shared in dialog and through the decisions of the Chapter. The Chapter will be a journey similar to that which we symbolically enacted from the Church of the Navicella to this splendid Basilica of the brothers martyrs Sts. John and Paul, whose restored Roman house of the 2nd century, is beneath the Basilica itself. The first reading

from today’s Mass also recalls this journey: “Remember how for forty years now the LORD, your God, has directed all your journeying in the desert, so as to test you by affliction and find out whether or not it was your intention to keep his commandments... For the LORD, your God, is bringing you into a good country...” (Dt. 8: 2,7) We have begun the journey from the Church of the Navicella because it was precisely in that same church that St. Paul of the Cross and his brother John Baptist, as we were reminded during the beginning of the liturgy, met with Pope Benedict XIII who went to visit the church to inspect the restoration work that was being done. It was 21 March 1725, the first day of spring during that Holy Year. The circumstances and the location in which this first meeting took place of St. Paul of the Cross and Venerable John Baptist with the Pope are a bit humorous and surprising. It is as if the plans of God, who lovingly accompanies and guides us, were already present and visible in several signs that can easily be recognized once we are aware of them.

-- Benedict XIII visits the church to inspect the restoration work.

-- The church is called “the Navicella” because of the fountain in front of the church that has a small stone ship in its waters.

-- The church of the Navicella presently borders on “Via S. Paolo della Croce” and the Arch of Dolabella and is joined to the gardens and to the retreat of Sts. John and Paul, the first religious house of the Passionists in Rome. Here St. Paul of the Cross will spend the final years of his life and will experience some profound mystical events. Here his body will rest. It is surprising to reflect on the interplay of symbols and coincidences which in fact aren’t coincidences, but part of the subtle thread of the plan of God. By taking a closer look the connections are visible.

-- The Pope visits the Church to inspect the restoration work. Bishop Cavalieri had discerned that the time was right for the new Congregation – the Church needed new fervor and restoration.

-- The Navicella: sign of the new Congregation that began its voyage in the history of the Church and the world. We don’t know if this was the reason why St. Paul of the Cross in one of his letters, would describe the Congregation as a small boat in the midst of the ocean.

-- The Basilica is dedicated to the two brothers-saints named John and Paul, as were Paul of the Cross and John Baptist.

-- The meeting took place on 21 March, the first day of Spring, signifying new life and new hope with the birth of a new Congregation.

Finally the two brothers are at the feet of the Pope and he benevolently receives them and grants them the now famous “VIVA VOCIS ORACULO”, the
permission to gather companions and therefore to begin the Foundation of the Congregation. It is what they longed for. The successor of Peter with his authority lays the foundation of “this poor and humble Congregation”, as St. Paul of the Cross used to refer to it. They were overjoyed. It is Spring; it has begun! The “navicellæ”, “little boat” leaves the pier and navigates toward Calvary. It is a premise that rests only upon an oral permission; but it is enough for Paul who lives by faith, to recognize the will of God and to know how to proceed. It is the wind of the Spirit of God. Before the written and canonical approvals the new religious family is already born in the plan of Providence. Pastor writes in his History of the Church: “St. Paul of the Cross who planned a new Congregation to promote local and foreign Missions received permission from Benedict XIII in 1725 to receive novices. Thus arose the order of the Passionist or discalced clerics of the Passion and Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ.” Even for Pastor, the Congregation is born on this first day of Spring in 1725 by the breath of the Spirit. It will work in the vineyard of the Lord and will itself be a vine. “I am the vine and you are the branches,” Jesus tells us in the Gospel. “He who remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit.” On the cross the crushed grapes will give abundant wine; it is the blood of Jesus that saves us. The mystery of love and suffering: the Passion of Jesus, the heart and center of our vocation, life and mission. “Brothers” writes St. Paul the Apostle to Philippians and to us, “have in you the same mind as was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God…humbles himself becoming obedient unto death, death on a cross...Because of this God highly exalted him...every tongue proclaim to the glory of God the Father, Jesus Christ is Lord.”

The paschal mystery is the source of life and love that brings about sentiments of love and reciprocal compassion and makes joy complete in union with the Spirit. It is by means of this spiritual abandonment that we should live the gracefilled event of the General Chapter.

The symbol of the vine and the branches, that are heavy with life and paschal mystery, the crushed grape, will be the theme of the chapter liturgies. During this period God with be present to us in his Word that has enlightened us until today. Our Congregation, a small vine, is called by God to live in renewed communion in the Holy Spirit, by means of the process of Restructuring which we place on the altar with the host and the wine that God may accept and bless it. However we are convinced that to succeed in this enterprise we must have deep faith and not deviate from the goal. We must avoid proposing paved streets, already leveled and more secure. Rather, if we want to bring about something new, useful and desirable to God, we must not imitate or do something which others have done. We must listen to the spirit and discern what God wants of us using a unique design. And we must avoid pessimism, laziness and doubt and keep our eyes fixed on the goal which is to make our life and mission more alive and efficacious. Then it will be possible to reach our goal for the coming of the Reign of God so that all people may understand that what we do is for them and for God and not for ourselves. The power of selflessness is incredible. The greatest “disinterest” in oneself took place on the cross when Jesus, “humbled himself becoming obedient to death”, and offering himself as a total gift to humanity and to all creation in the will of the Father. And for us the Crucified One is the master whom we must follow and imitate. May Mary, Mother of the Passion and the Crucified Risen One, accompany us with her maternal heart on the Chapter journey that we are undertaking today with this Eucharistic celebration in which we will mystically die with Jesus and among ourselves with a unique and singular death and “we will become one body and one spirit” in Jesus, though Jesus and with Jesus. Amen. ===

“The symbol of the vine and the branches that are heavy with life and paschal mystery, the crushed grape, will be the theme of the Chapter liturgies.”
“It is a great joy to be here!”
The homily of Fr. Ottaviano D’Egidio on the
Solemnity of St. Paul of the Cross

19 October 2006

V. Rev. Ottaviano D’Egidio, Superior General

The feast of St. Paul of the Cross that we celebrate on
the occasion of the General Chapter during this year of
grace 2006, takes on special significance due to the
presence of our religious who represent the numerous
parts of the world where the Passionist Congregation
lives and ministers. It is a great joy to be here in this
Basilica where the body of our Father and Founder rests
and to share the joy of being together to celebrate this
Eucharist.

The first reading of the liturgy is taken from the
prophet Isaiah: “The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon
me, because the LORD has anointed me; He has sent
me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the broken-
hearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives and release
to the prisoners, To announce a year of favor from the
LORD…” (Is. 61:1). Jesus in the Gospel refers to him-
self in this line of Isaiah: “Today this scripture passage
is fulfilled in your hearing.” (Lk. 4:21).

Jesus who was consecrated and sent by the Father
will bring the good news to the poor by assuming their
poverty; he will bind up the wounds of the brokenheart-
ed with his own wounds and with his heart pierced by
the soldier’s lance (“They will look upon him whom
they have thrust through”, Jn.19:37); he will proclaim
liberty to slaves and freedom to those in prison; from
the extreme loneliness of Calvary he will proclaim a
year of mercy from the Lord: “My God, my God, why
have you abandoned me?” and endure the sarcasm of
those who wanted him dead: “come down…and then
we will believe”—far from all human mercy and pity!

He took our guilt upon himself, he bore our sins,
which by the thousands pierced his heart. He accepted
our condemnation: “He became one of us” and his
death has given us life. This is the greatest mystery of
the love and the mercy of God—“the miracle of mira-
cles”—by which St. Paul of the Cross will refer to the
Passion of Jesus. And it was a gift of the Holy Spirit, a
charism to be able to understand it and to make it the
center of his life and of his apostolate and then to found
the Congregation. He understood that the only remedy
for the evils of the world was the contemplation and the
proclamation of the Passion of Jesus.

He chose places to found our religious houses,
that he called “retreats”, in solitude and immersed in
nature, so that silence and recollection could favor the
hearing and the contemplation of the Word of God:
“The houses shall be constructed in retired places, that
the devout brethren after their apostolic labors, under-
gone for the glory of God and the salvation of souls,
may withdraw from the society of men and the noise of
the world to devote themselves in solitude to their own
spiritual advancement, to prayers, fastings, and other
spiritual exercises, by which they may be more and
more inflamed with divine love.” (Rule,1775). Returning
from the missions and ministries, he invited the religious
to “seek religious quiet and pious medita-
tion at the feet of Jesus Christ crucified”.

The contemplative life must be the life blood
that gives life to its children and forms them as authen-
tic men of God, capable of bringing the experience and
the message of the love of God to their “crucified”
brothers and sisters of the world.

Furthermore, Paul wanted his religious to go and
to evangelize in the most abandoned places where no
one else wanted to go, even in the disease and malaria
infested swamp lands of the “maremme”, and he him-
self served as an example. The living memory of the
Crucified One, the folly of God’s love and his wisdom,
would be the motivation for the existence, the life and
the apostolate of St. Paul of the Cross. It is the Crucified One who would define his life, his charism and his activity in the Church and as it was for him, so it should also be for the Congregation and for us. In his message of 14 October 1975, on the occasion of the bicentennial of the death of the Founder, Pope Paul VI wrote the following: “In praise of St. Paul we wish to reiterate what he proposed for himself and for his companions as means of studying, preaching, living and loving not just any aspect of our religion; rather that which is the most profound, the holiest and the mostly highly revered, i.e. the Passion of Christ.”

We are inheritors of this spirituality and of this gift of the Holy Spirit to the Founder. And like him we should be present in the “maremme” (swamps) of the countries where we minister, to recognize the face of the Crucified One in “the crucified” of this world and be in solidarity with them by means of our concrete decisions.

In addition to the three monastic vows that are common to all religious, our Congregation professes a special vow: “We express our participation in the Passion by a special vow, which is at once personal, communitarian, and apostolic. Through this vow we bind ourselves to keep alive the memory of the Passion of Christ. By word and deed we strive to foster awareness of its meaning and value for each person and for the life of the world….In the light of this, we seek to incorporate this vow into our daily lives by living the evangelical counsels.” (Constitutions, No. 6). The Constitutions state that “to keep alive the memory of the Passion of Christ” and “to incorporate (this vow)”, words alone and good intentions are not enough; we are asked for “deed(s)” and for “incorporation” (concretization). Living the “Memoria Passionis” opens new horizons before us. The General Chapter is a time for decisions; it is an opportunity that God offers us that should not be lost.

The process of Restructuring itself can be an instrument for strengthening our spiritual life and for giving new vitality to community life and to our mission; however it is necessary to be docile and to allow ourselves to be refashioned by the Spirit. We must love and respect the past and tradition, but we must not be imprisoned by it. Courage and strength are given to us by the Word of God and for us this Word is specifically the Word of the Cross. The cross is the motive for our mission. A God who speaks of love and forgiveness as he is dying on the cross demands fidelity and concrete solidarity with one another in which he takes on a specific identity. (Mt. 25:40).

This is the inheritance that St. Paul of the Cross has left us and which has been presented to the world by means of the Passionist Congregation for almost three hundred years. There are various congregations and religious institutes that exist in the Church which follow or have taken their inspiration from his charism. In 1771, in association with Venerable Maria Crocifissa di Gesù, he himself founded the female branch of the cloistered Passionist Nuns, that have the specific mission of living each day in contemplation for the purpose of sustaining the apostolate of the Passionists. Even today in the various monasteries that are present throughout the world, there is this spiritual support for the apostolate of the Congregation. Additionally there are the Passionist Sisters of St. Paul of the Cross; the religious Sisters of the Cross and Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ; The Daughters of the Passion and the Sorrowful Virgin and the Secular Missionaries of the Passion and others.

But the power of the Spirit cannot remain inside the walls of convents and monasteries. St. Paul of the Cross understood this well and in his many letters of spiritual direction and in his vast correspondence with the laity, “tertaries” and “oblates” (which were subsequently suppressed) were also founded and in 1775, the year of his death, the Confraternity of the Passion. It was founded in Veroli in the Italian province of Frosinone and it became widely diffused; but presently,
although it is present in various places, the number of its members has diminished.

However, there are laity who today share the same charism of the Congregation and keep alive the “memory” of the Passion of the Lord with various titles in the 58 nations where the Congregation is present and ministers. It is encouraging to note this and also to observe that the present General Chapter, beyond the Chapter of 2000, is open to further development in this area. In one of the documents of Puebla (Conference of Bishops, 1979) it states that the laity are members of the Church in the heart of the world and a member of the world in the heart of the Church. And we can say that the lay Passionist is a member of the Passionist Family in the heart of the world and a member of the world in the heart of the Passionist Family.

The young people of “Tendopoli” that are assisting with this Eucharistic celebration have a strong Passionist identity and have made a proposal to the present Chapter, signed by Fr. Francesco Cordeschi, C.P. their founder and moderator, that they be recognized as a movement within the Passionist Family.

May the Holy Spirit also increase the charism among the laity, through formation, spiritual/apostolic life, while respecting their own state in life and uniqueness. The Passionist Congregation needs to think about its own spiritual and cultural projects and it needs to also do so from the perspective of the distinctive models of collaboration that the laity can offer.

How can I conclude without remembering Mary?

St. Paul of the Cross had a strong Marian spirituality. He believed that the Passion of the Son, Jesus, and of the Mother formed a single Passion. He compared the sorrows of Mary to the ocean and said that “in the Passion of Jesus there were two seas of sorrow: one of the Son and the other of the Mother” but that they formed a single ocean of love. Therefore Mary is the one who most profoundly knows the mystery of the mercy of God since she experienced his Passion. On Calvary, at the foot of the cross, she is crucified in silence with Him. She is the mother of the Crucified One who bleeds in her heart in union with him. She will hear him cry out: “I thirst”. She will want to reach out to him, but she cannot do so as she once did in Nazareth when Jesus was thirsty and asked her for water. And to think that at Cana there was an over abundance of water that was changed into wine by Jesus!

But now Jesus gives her another maternal moment: “Women, behold your son.” And from her new identity as mother the strangest children would be born. Finally orphans, derelicts, unrepentant sinners will have a mother in common with God. Adam and Eve will also have a mother and even Judas Iscariot, if he had so wanted, would have had the most loving mother. A new world is born beneath the Cross.

May Mary, who witnessed the growth of Jesus and who patiently and faithfully cared for him when he would return to Nazareth from his mission during the three years of his public ministry, only to accompany him to Jerusalem, also be with the Congregation with her maternal heart along the road to Restructuring.

May St. Paul of the Cross, our common Father, whose feast we celebrate with hearts filled with hope, encourage and strengthen within all of us, religious and laity, the “living memory” of the Passion of Jesus, “the greatest and most overwhelming work of God’s love.”
Areas of Priority for Strategic Planning Within the Passionist Congregation

PRINCIPAL DEGREE OF THE 45TH GENERAL CHAPTER

Introduction

The 45th General Chapter enthusiastically commits the Congregation to proceed with the process of Restructuring that was begun at the General Synod of 2004 and which will continue at least until the next General Chapter. This commitment is undertaken in order to promote the life and vitality of the Congregation and in order to more effectively respond to the Gospel mandate and to our Passionist vocation: to proclaim the message of the Cross in today’s world.

The Chapter supports the plan of Restructuring for two reasons:

• First, because we have discerned the call of the Spirit of God from North and South, East and West, to more profoundly commit the Congregation to the Memoria Passionis. Our fidelity to the Passionist charisma is sustained by the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church. It is in our lived experience of Church that we discover how to respond to the movement of the Holy Spirit, i.e. what are our life-giving memories and what are the realities that we wish to leave behind us because they are no longer adequate and/or life-giving.

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

Faithful to the workings of the Spirit, we are offered a new way of reflecting on our life; a new way of interacting with each other and the possibility of recreating the structures and the institutions that are at the service of the charism.

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

• Secondly, we recognize that the Spirit has already begun the process of Restructuring in many areas of the Congregation where new ways of responding to contemporary challenges already exist. The Chapter wishes to encourage and develop these initiatives throughout the Congregation. Some “structures” which in the past sustained the life of the Congregation must change if we wish to promote Passionist growth in the 21st century. The Chapter commits the Congregation to study and evaluate all of its priorities and needs, its strengths and its weaknesses. The Chapter believes that this will favor a greater appreciation of Passionist identity and will favor the development of a religious Congregation that is in fact more international and more effective for the Church of today and tomorrow.

The Decree

The Chapter has discerned ten priorities that will serve to guide our process of Restructuring on all levels. The Chapter decrees that every Province, Vice-Province and Vicariate develop a plan for the future of its life and mission.

In the process of developing this plan, every Province, Vice-Province and Vicariate can work independently or in collaboration with others, either within or beyond its own Region.

These plans will be shared on a regional basis. They will also be shared with the entire Congregation with the goal of providing a foundation for the next General Synod and for the next phase of Restructuring.
The General Government will be responsible for the process of Restructuring with regard to promoting provincial, inter-provincial and inter-regional coordination in the hope of proceeding in the most effective way possible, in particular to insure that all of the parts of the Congregation interact with each other. The Chapter especially underlined the importance of creative dialog between the older, historical areas of the Congregation and those that are more recent.

Areas of Priority

1. International Collaboration for Community Life and Mission

The General Chapter is convinced that in this process of Restructuring we must coordinate all of our resources in all of the Provinces, Vice-Provinces and Vicariates in order to bring about greater collaboration in Passionist life and apostolate. Although several steps have already been taken in this process, there is still much to be done. Restructuring offers the entire Congregation the opportunity to focus on our mission and to discern where to best use our resources. If we generously share personnel, financial resources and other elements we can greatly increase the assistance that we give to one another in carrying out our mission and it will serve as a means of exemplifying the spiritual communion that exists among us.

The creation of international Passionist communities is one way in which this collaboration can be expressed for community life and mission and it can be an important evangelical witness in a world that is characterized by ethnic and cultural tensions. The members of these communities should receive adequate preparation.

In the process of planning for collaboration in the various regions and areas of dialog we should also be mindful of the demands and the plans of the local Church in which we live and minister. It is important to remember that Passionists live and minister within the larger context of the Church.

2. Solidarity in the areas of personnel and finances

From the earliest days of our Congregation there has always existed a spirit of fraternal solidarity. As was stated above, the General Chapter again wishes to encourage a deep sense of solidarity among all the members of the Congregation. One of the primary objectives of Restructuring is a greater spirit of solidarity that is expressed in concrete ways. Individual religious as well as the Provinces, Vice-Provinces and Vicariates are invited to be mindful of the needs of the Congregation throughout the world. Every juridical entity is called to dialog with the other entities in order to share priorities and objectives and develop specific projects and the sharing of resources.

The General government will promote this sharing by developing more suitable means and more precise criteria for this purpose. One significant expression of this sharing is the Solidarity Fund. The local entities of the Congregation are called to dedicate themselves in concrete ways to the development of this fund. The General government will also consider the overall mission of the Congregation in order to encourage the religious to serve in diverse cultural contexts beyond the confines of their own province and nation.

3. A revision of the structures of government, communication and juridical entities.

One essential aspect of Restructuring involves the evaluation of the juridical entities and the governmental structures within the Congregation. The juridical entities within the Congregation are the Provinces, the Vice-Provinces and the Vicariates. The combination of
these entities comprises the regional Conferences which presently total seven in the Congregation. According to our General Regulations the regional Conferences serve as means of promoting and organizing communication, cooperation and coordination between the various common areas of interest and the initiatives among these juridical Entities (#94). The regional Conferences possess no juridical authority of their own.

While some Provinces, Vice-provinces and regional Vicariates within the Congregation are experiencing a significant decrease in personnel, others, especially in the recently established jurisdictions, are enjoying a significant numerical increase in professed members and candidates. Many have expressed the desire that the Congregation reconfigure its own jurisdictions in order to facilitate greater solidarity and to promote our mission and our future. Some models of possible reconfiguration have already been proposed and are available for study. Other possible models can also be submitted for consideration.

The General Chapter calls the members of the Provinces, Vice-provinces and Vicariates to include discussion about the problems concerning the structures of government and the juridical Entities in their strategic planning. These studies on the Province, Vice-Province, Vicariate and Regional levels will take place within the process of Restructuring and will last until the next General Synod.

4. Formation

Formation was an important topic in the discussion of the General Chapter of 2006. Our concern for formation in Passionist life and apostolate is reflected in our preferential option for the young. The members of the Chapter believe that the Congregation must do everything possible to offer fundamental and effective formation to its new members. We are also committed to increase our efforts in the area of on-going formation for our professed Passionists.

Among those who need opportunities for on-going formation are those religious who are ministering in the area of initial formation as well as those who minister in positions of leadership in the Congregation.

The Chapter urges provinces/vice-provinces/vicariates to evaluate the programs of initial forma-
tion which are already in place. They should pay close attention to the quality of Passionist life within the local community in which formation for new members takes place. Formation communities should be places where younger and senior religious can live together in mutual enrichment. They must be hospitable environments in which healthy, mature relationships among the religious can be fostered.

The Chapter also recommends the creation of structures for the mentoring of those religious who have recently professed perpetual vows and/or have been ordained.

The strategic planning that takes place in regional conferences should include exploration of ways in which entities within the Congregation can collaborate in the work of formation. These entities may wish to explore the possibility of establishing houses of formation that are international in character.

5. Commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

Another priority is that of commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation. This commitment is profoundly rooted in our charism. Our Constitutions express our desire “to share in the distress of all, especially those who are poor and neglected…” (Const.#3). We believe that the power of the Cross offers us the strength to discern and to alleviate the burden of suffering experienced by the poor and the mar-
ginalized of our world. The preferential option for the poor has a central role in the process of Restructuring, guiding us to channel and utilize our resources.

Furthermore, the ecological crisis of the world in which we live invites us to be concerned about the safeguarding and the protection of creation.

The commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation that is already present in various areas and apostolates of the Congregation should be integrated into all levels of planning in the Provinces, Vice-provinces and Vicariates including the area of initial formation. With this goal in mind, we must avail ourselves of the good use of available contacts and networks within the Congregation.

6. Collaboration with the Laity

Since the time of St. Paul of the Cross our Congregation has been blessed by the presence and support of many laymen and women who have shared in our charism in a variety of ways. In recent years, as the Church has recognized the fundamental role of the laity in the mission of proclaiming the Gospel, our collaboration with the laity has increased significantly. The General Chapter wishes to endorse this collaboration and asks those who are responsible for planning on all levels to include this topic in their strategic planning. The Laity of the Passionist Family who collaborate with us should be involved in the planning process. They should be present when the Provinces, the Vice-Provinces and the Vicariates develop their strategic plans and their input will be considered in regional dialog about strategic planning. The Provinces, Vice-Provinces and the Vicariates should study the ways in which the laity may become involved in our life and apostolate. Those in authority on Provincial, Vice-Provincial and Vicariate levels should also dialogue with the religious about the importance of collaboration with the laity.

The General and his Council will provide criteria for establishing various levels of participation for the laity who wish to share in our life.

7. Dialog with the world of culture and the arts and sciences.

In his Report to the General Chapter, Fr. Ottaviano D’Egidio, Superior General, highlighted the importance of culture as a vehicle for proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ. Through the years individual Passionists have enriched our life and mission through their involvement in the world of culture. Their talents have helped to disseminate the message of the Cross. The General Chapter considers dialog with culture to be a priority for the mission of the Congregation in our contemporary world.

In particular, artistic expression discloses levels of truth that transcend the limits of rational argumentation and practical reasoning. Our encounter with art and culture in all its forms engages the heart and not simply the mind. Beauty is a transcendental reality and as such is expressive of the nature of God. The Chapter also asks that those in positions of leadership within the Congregation encourage the cultivation of artistic interest and talent in the religious, particularly in those in initial formation.

8. Communications

In a world characterized by an ongoing revolution in communications, the General Chapter wishes to highlight this theme and to urge that it be given special attention in the process of strategic planning. Above all, local entities as well as regions should further the quality of communication among Passionists. This concern will also occur on the general level.

Because the knowledge of more than one language is essential to communication in the contemporary world and within our own Congregation, the provi-
sion of opportunities for our religious to learn other lan-
guages should be a dimension of strategic planning.

In order to proclaim the Good News of the cru-
cified and risen Christ, it is important to know how to
utilize television, radio, and the printed media, as well
as the Internet. Use of the Internet as a means of evan-
gelization is particularly important in our preferential
option for youth. Significant progress in the use of these
media has already been made in many areas of the
Congregation. The General Chapter urges that there be
new efforts in this field and that new ways of collabora-
tion between provinces/vice-provinces/vicariates in the
media ministry be explored.

9. Ecumenism and Inter-religious Dialogue

The Constitutions of the Congregation state that
unity among all Christians is one of the chief concerns
of the Church, and they call us to engage in ecumenical
activities whenever possible (n. 74). This commitment
to Christian ecumenism is rooted in the hopes and
dreams of Saint Paul of the Cross, and it was expressed
in a special way in the ministry of Blessed Dominic
Barberi. The General Chapter calls the provinces/vice-
provinces/vicariates and the regional conferences to
incorporate this summons to work for the unity of
Christians into their strategic planning. They should
build upon the ecumenical activities that are already
taking place.

In recent
t years, we have
become more keen-
ly aware that we
live and minister in
a religiously plural-
istic world. Some
Passionists live and
work in areas of the
world where
Christians represent
a small minority of
the population. All
of us are aware that
the well being of
the human family
requires serious and
sustained efforts to develop
understanding between people of different faith tradi-
tions. The General Chapter calls the members of the
Congregation to include the topic of this area of min-
istry, in which some of our religious are already
engaged, in their planning for the future. All of us
should strive to deepen our understanding of other faith
traditions and take concrete steps toward promoting
dialogue and cooperation with persons of these tradi-
tions.

10. Preferential Option for Youth.

The preferential option for young people has been a
very important topic discussed at the General Chapter.
We have felt a special urgency about the need to reach
out more effectively to those who represent the future of
the world and of the Church. This conviction is fully in
accord with the important statements of recent popes
and other Church authorities concerning a preferential
option for the young. Accordingly, the General Chapter
calls upon all the members of the Congregation to
examine ways in which we can minister more effective-
ly to young people in our mission throughout the world.
These renewed efforts at evangelization of youth must
be animated by a spirit of attentive listening to the
needs and concerns of young people. We must invite
youth to speak to us about their hopes and dreams, their
fears and concerns, and their spiritual aspirations.

Conclusion

The General Chapter wishes to encourage all the mem-
bers of the Congregation to take an active role in plan-
ning for our future. We believe that the areas of priority
described above, while not exhaustive of the themes to
be considered in strategic planning, are worthy of spe-
cial attention. Careful and sustained reflection on these
dimensions of Passionist life and mission will contribute
significantly to the vitality of our Congregation now and in
the future.

We profess our trust in the faithful and provident care of
God for our Congregation.

God blessed Saint Paul of the
Cross with the wonderful
gift of the Memoria Passionis.
We believe that God will
continue to pour out his gifts upon us and the people
whom we serve. This confidence gives us a spirit of
profound hope about the future of Passionist life and
ministry.

Fr. Guy Sionneau (MICH) and Fr. Isaias Kishi (MAIAP)
THE ELEVATION OF THE QUEEN OF PEACE PROVINCE (REPAC), Indonesia

On 12 May, 2006, the Vice-Provincial, Fr. Sabinus Lohin, with the consent of the Assembly of the Vice-Province that took place from 18-20 October 2004, requested the elevation of the Vice-Province to the status of Province. The Superior General and his council carefully studied the request on 28 March and again on 23 September, 2006, and acknowledged the abundant blessings of God on the missionary work that was accomplished with enthusiasm and sacrifice by the Passionist missionaries of the SPE Province of Holland from 1946 to 1961 and since 1961 with the valuable collaboration of the PIET Province of Italy. In particular, God has generously blessed the vocation ministry that began in 1973 in Kalimantan Barat, and which subsequently was extended to the other islands, while further developing the necessary support structures. Together the young religious have responded positively and generously to the grace of God, by means of which the vicariate of the Most Holy Sacrament, created in 1973 within the PIET Province, and the province of the Most Holy Redeemer, founded in 1983 within the context of the SPE Province could move positively toward the future. In order to give greater stability to this future of the Congregation, the Superior General, in a common agreement with the SPE and PIET Provinces, proceeded with the unification of the two vicariates into one, dependent on the General. In light of the growth evidenced in formation, community, apostolic and financial areas, the Superior General, with the consensus of his council decided positively for the elevation of the vicariate to a Vice-Province on 30 September 2002 and which took place during the congress of the Vicariate in November, 2002.

Considering the on-going development of the Vice-Province during these past years, the Superior General and his council decided to present the matter to the General Chapter to further highlight the matter and to encourage all of the religious of Indonesia to persevere in their fidelity to the commitment “to strive to keep alive… the memory of the Passion… in our continual efforts to follow Jesus Crucified.” (Const. No. 100)

DECREE OF ESTABLISHMENT

The members of the 45th General Chapter, on the feast of St. Paul of the Cross, 19 October 2006, in accord with norm 104 of the Constitutions, erect the Vice Province of our Lady Of Peace in the Republic of Indonesia, as a Province with the same name.

At the same time the following are confirmed until the conclusion of their present mandate: Father Sabinus Lohin in the office of Provincial and Gabriel Antonelli, Pius Barces, Stephanus Lengi and Krisantus Krisantus as Consultors of the Province.

May the Lord, through the intercession of Mary, Queen of Peace and Patroness of the Congregation, of St. Paul of the Cross, our Founder, of the saints and the beati of the Passionist Family, grant to our religious of the new province “a steadfast will to live and work joyfully as a community of brothers, observing the Constitutions in the spirit of St. Paul of the Cross; a firm resolve to foster in ourselves the spirit of prayer, and to teach others to pray; a keen attention to the needs of others, as we strive to lead them to the fullness of their Christian calling through the message of the Cross”.

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Message of His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI to the Superior General and the Congregation On The Occasion Of the 45th General Chapter

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE
FROM THE VATICAN, 29 September 2006
N. 46.325

Reverend Father,

His Holiness was pleased to know that the Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ is about to celebrate its General Chapter in Rome, from 1 to 21 October of this year. On this special occasion he sends to you and to the participants his best wishes, that are extended to all of this religious Family, with which he shares a long friendship, and by means of which he has come to admire, since the early years of his academic life in Germany, the figure of Saint Paul of the Cross. He hopes that the work of the capitulars is fruitful, a work that is especially dedicated to “restructuring” and to the “revitalization” of the presence of the Passionists in the Church and in the world, to translate the ageless teachings of the Founder into works that are in keeping with the times.

Paul of the Cross perceived the Passion of Jesus as the greatest manifestation of the love of God, possessing a capacity for converting hearts more effectively than any other means. In fact, only by the light of the Cross can one draw near to the mystery of divine Love. “His death on the Cross”, Benedict XVI affirms in his Encyclical Deus caritas est, “is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form.” (No. 12).

This is the message which you are also called to announce in this day and age; this is the heart of your charism, that which inspires the contemplation to which you must dedicate yourselves in the solitude of your retreats, as Paul of the Cross referred to your religious houses, or by creating an analogous space for contemplation in the various situations in which you currently carry out your mission. It concerns a mission that is always valid: i.e. to demonstrate that the Cross is love and that love is God. As your Founder often repeated: from the ocean of the love of the Father flows the ocean of suffering of the Passion of Jesus; from the Heart of the Father comes the Passion of the Heart of Jesus and his Body which is the Church. Your Founder was deeply convinced that the evils of the world derive from forgetting the Passion of Jesus. Consequently, his constant endeavor was to remember the Passion and to invite others to do the same. Union with Christ Crucified became for him the inspiration to be in communion with all people; the passion for justice and for charity. In the mystery of the Cross he found the strength to act and to value self-denial and suffering, always desiring to share in the suffering of the Redeemer for the evils of humanity.

The Supreme Pontiff, while thanking the Lord for the witness of your religious lives and for the numerous works of apostolic ministry that you undertake, encourages you to bring to a good conclusion...
the task of “Restructuring” that you have undertaken with the goal of better responding to the challenges of our time, while bearing in mind the different cultural contexts in which you are present. The teaching expressed in various documents of the pontifical Magisterium can serve to guide your spiritual and pastoral efforts, among them the Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consacrata in which we read: “Institutes of Consecrated Life are thus invited courageously to propose anew the enterprising initiative, creativity and holiness of their founders and foundresses in response to the signs of the times emerging in today's world. This invitation is first of all a call to perseverance on the path of holiness in the midst of the material and spiritual difficulties of daily life. But it is also a call to pursue competence in personal work and to develop a dynamic fidelity to their mission, adapting forms, if need be, to new situations and different needs, in complete openness to God's inspiration and to the Church's discernment.” (No. 37).

In your work of “Restructuring” keep in mind the urgent goal of the unity of the Congregation and each one's responsibility for its various entities; the search for formation that is always more unified and profound; the exchange of personnel and means of support above all keeping in mind reciprocal support between countries that are economically sound and those that are developing; receptivity to collaboration with the local Churches, with Institutes that are associated with you, with the laity; a consciousness of new forms of poverty and the “crucified” of our time. By employing new means, may your concern be that of manifesting that same love for the Church and the same apostolic zeal for souls that characterized your Founder. Furthermore, the involvement of all the members of your Congregation in reflection on the charism of the Passion, as well as in a search for lifestyles and apostolates that are more authentic and faithful to your origins, cannot do other than inspire within you the desire for a more profound intimacy with Christ. This will keep you from the risk of succumbing to worldly influences and the culture of secularization, which also tries to penetrate the minds and hearts of consecrated religious. In particular, the Holy Father exhorts the cloistered nuns founded by St. Paul of the Cross to renew their fervor in prayer, the offering of themselves and their witness, accepting with docile trust the directives of the competent Authorities of the Holy See toward a modification of their structures in keeping with present day needs.

His Holiness Benedict XVI, assuring you of a special remembrance in his prayer, invokes upon the General Chapter the maternal protection of Mary, who from your beginnings has been venerated in her Presentation in the Temple and whom you have subsequently chosen, under the title of “Mother of Sorrows”, as your Patroness, and the heavenly intercession of the Founder and the saints and beat of your Congregation. With these sentiments, he imparts to you, Reverend Father, and to all the Passionist Family the Apostolic Blessing.

I also include my sincerest best wishes and I take this opportunity to reaffirm my religious esteem.

Devotedly yours in the Lord,

TARCISIO CARD. BERTONE
Secretary of State
PRIESTLY ORDINATIONS

On July 1, 2006, Fr. Carlos Armando Hernández Córdoba was ordained in the FID Vice-Province of Colombia and on the same day, Fr. Lukas Stefan Franz Temme of the VULN Province of Germany and Fr. Marco Cola of the PIET Province of Italy were also ordained. On 29 July 2006, Frs. Bernard Mbugua Maguta, Francis Oguda Owano and Alfred Orwa Bwana were ordained to the priesthood for the CORM CARLW Vicariate of Kenya. In the MACOR Province of Korea, on 14 August 2006, Fr. Dominic Jin Jeon was ordained. On the following day, 15 August 2006, Fr. William Pondo was ordained in the PASS Province of the Philippines. Again in the PIET Province of Italy, Fr. Vincenzo Di Clerico was ordained to the priesthood on 19 August, 2006. During the month of September, 2006 the following religious received the sacrament of Holy Orders: On September 16, Fr. Maurizio Cino of the LAT Province of Italy; in the CFIXI Province of Sicily on Sept. 17, Fr. Francesco Di Mariano; in the REPAC Province of Indonesia: Frs. Adiantus Adiantus, Kornelius Lius, Yohanes Sunardi Benyamin Serani; and finally on Sept. 23 in the DOL VICT Vicariate of Brazil, Luiz Cláudio Alvez Diniz.

DIACONATE ORDINATIONS

On 11 June 2006, José Wawa Ombien and Martin Ngoy Molamba of the SALV Vice-Province of Congo were ordained to the diaconate. In the CALV Vicariate of Brazil, Alan Hildeu Felício, Edilberto Lins de Menezes, Sidnei da Silva and Gesner José Coube were ordained deacons on 24 June 2006. Finally, Armando Morales Aparicio of the REG Province of Mexico was ordained deacon on 17 September 2006.

PROFESSION OF FIRST VOWS

In the FID Vicariate of Colombia, Dionisio Hernández Lizcano, Andrés Yamit Carrillo Mendoza and Juan Pablo Paladinez Anacona professed first vows on 30 June 2006. Three religious of the REG Province of Mexico professed vows on 15 July 2006: Pedro Méndez Mendoza, Carlos Leonardo García Hernández and Enrique Bermúdez Martínez. On 9 September 2006, the following religious of the CFIXI Province of Sicily professed vows: Gaetano Costa, Hermanus Beda Koten, Yohanes Varis Tue Nuwa, Rosario Fontana and Sixtus Sang. In the FAM Province of Spain professed Carlos Mijares Gonzalez professed vows on 12 Sept. 2006 and on 13 Sept. in the PIET Province of Italy, Gianni Lazzarin professed first vows. On 15 Sept. in the LAT Province of Italy Giuseppe Cascardi and Joseph Barbieri professed vows. And finally, on 17 Sept. the following religious of the FAT Province of Portugal professed first vows: Hugo Filipe Rodrigues Figueria, Nuno Filipe Ventura Martins, César Miguel da Silva Costa and Ricardo Filipe Aguiar Sousa Marques, and the 27 October Isidro Flores Flores in the FAM Province.

PROFESSION OF FINAL VOWS

In the SALV Vice-Province of D. Rep. of Congo, the following religious professed Final Vows on 6 August 2006: Thierry Ntam Yer-iyö Anaclet Muke Samba, Alain Ndombe Muamba and Blaise-Pascal Muswar Mutimi. On Sept. 23, 2006 in the CORI Province of Spain, Fernando Bar Quintáns professed Perpetual Vows. And finally, in the CRUC THOM Vicariate of India, Jose Mathew Kulangarathottiyl professed Final Vows on 10 October 2006.
THE LITURGIES OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER
RELAXATION AND RECREATION
FRATERNAL GATHERINGS AND SMALL GROUP MEETINGS


NOTITIAE OBITU

Usque ad diem 29 octobris 2006, acceptae

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MONIALES ET SORORES

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