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I. Various perspectives for reading: The framework for situating reflection on the theological dimension

The objective of this reflection is to systematically present an existential understanding of the Constitutions that is both “faith-based and charismatic” that are received and embraced as a “plan for life” in faith. This is understood as a process of configuration “through Christ” and “in Him”.

The theological dimension of the Constitutions can be perceived from various perspectives. I will list several of these:

A) The theological dimension of the Constitutions is expressed in speaking about God, about Christ, about the Church, the Holy Spirit and the fundamental charism. We can approach the Constitutions with a certain disquieting challenge in order to discover: What face of God do the Constitutions present to us? How do the Constitutions present Jesus Christ to us? How do they envision religious life? This kind of study is necessary and enriching. However, it is not sufficient if the only thing that I discover in them is information. Although they contain theology, the Constitutions are not merely a theological manual.

B) A second way of considering the theological dimension of the Constitutions is to view the process of growth as a work of the Spirit, in the womb of the Church, the first fruit of a grateful believer, St. Paul of the Cross. In his Diary he describes it in this way: “I asked my Sovereign Good if he wished me to write the Rule for the Poor of Jesus and I felt myself strongly moved with great sweetness.” (27 November 1720). This approach does not refer to the content as much as it does to the inspiration that created the Constitutions. If we consider them to be the fruit of the Spirit, the crystallization of a grace which in light of its objective and the interpersonal dimensions that they acquire – in a community setting – then there is power to be communicated and shared, configured through relationship with others from the first moment of their existence. In this study one can discern the resolution of inconsistencies which already existed in the life of St. Paul of the Cross. He too struggled as he wrestled with successive modifications and approbations. This was something that he bore in a spirit of great self-confidence and trust. He wrote about this to the bishop of Alessandria, Bishop Gattinara: “And so that Your Excellency may have a clearer idea of the Institute, I would emphasize that our Rules and Constitutions were allowed to remain in their essence except for a very few things, which do not touch on the essentials of the Institute. They were approved as written, for they were based on the infallible truth of the Gospel.” (Let. II, 270; 6 July 1741).
C) A third way of viewing the Constitutions from a theological perspective is to look for ways in them of configuring our personal and community existence in its external dimension or that of “communion”. It is a theological dimension because it is the praxis of communion, belonging and the fulfillment of the mission. This approach tries to highlight the institutional origins of the Constitutions, as well as their charismatic and social dimensions that pertain to a charism that aims at being ecclesial.

The theological nature of the Constitutions can be considered from at least three perspectives: doctrinal, inspirational or charismatic, and institutional.

II. The “theological” dimension of the Constitutions: Meaning, means of access and experience.

Keeping in mind the elements that were studied above and using them as fundamental components, the Constitutions are a concrete expression of evangelical life that we have chosen, the realization of our baptismal existence: “Baptism immerse us in the flood of divine power welling up from the death and resurrection of Jesus, and consecrates us as members of the people of God. This consecration we reaffirm, and resolve to live a fuller life through our religious profession, faithful to these Constitutions.” (Const. No.7) Emphasizing this dimension indicates that the Constitutions are not merely a spiritual book about vows; they are the “theological path which configures me to Christ, in his Paschal mystery, which God in his love desires for me.” It is by entering into the theological, Christological and “personal-intimate” nature of the Constitutions that I can arrive at the reality of a “personal, theological plan for life.”

The theological dimension, as different from doctrinal dimension, highlights what is of primary and fundamental importance. It is that by which one “encounters”, enters into a personal relationship; by which one establishes a dialog, employing the plan by which one is radically identified at the source of his being; the realization that one is called. This does not occur on the perimeter of the “logos”, of the “word”, of signs and structures. These are incarnations, facilitating factors, but they do not have to compromise any of the character of “mediation” (which in the Christian tradition is more correctly referred to as ‘sacramental’, ‘symbolic’ and ‘parabolic’.) The Constitutions as a written text serve as a reference point. They are a very effective ‘sacramental’ sign which produces an interaction that is constitutive and that places demands on my life. St. Paul of the Cross reminded his religious on 30 November 1760: “I ask you to be most exact in the observance of the Rules, even the least rule, which were approved by the Sovereign Pontiff, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, as appears in our apostolic brief, and were established by God to bring you to holiness by the exact observance of the same.”

Now we may ask: How can we profoundly live out this dimension of the Constitutions? What means or routes should we take? What faith dimension needs to be developed on a personal as well as a community level?

ACCESSING THE THEOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF THE CONSTITUTIONS

1. Realize that the Constitutions are the fruit of an existential dialog initiated by the Spirit and whose action and presence are enduring.

“In the beginning...” there was an invitation and the attractive and transforming power of Jesus Christ that calls forth from the Church a person or persons who highlight an aspect of this Mystery and of a need or a Mission. They reveal this Mystery, and embody this Mission. These produce a process of discernment, calculations and realizations. In subsequent
mments, companions or brothers gather. The individual acquires a communitarian dimension and, in successive phases he acquires a universal or ecclesial dimension. This ongoing process has successive phases, one of them being the “crystallization” of a text in order to discover its meaning and intrinsic vitality. It always has to be discovered and be understood within the context and the dynamic from which it arose. If I permit it to do so, it speaks to me about the impact, the welcoming, the intuition and the initiative of the Holy Spirit in those who are Founders, and reveals a symbiosis that provokes a tension that is enigmatic or paradoxical. The Spirit configures existence but at the same time it offers a model and is enfleshed in the personal perception of the one who embraces it. Thus, we constantly refer to the Founder so that today we may discover his charismatic grace and also the challenge to insert that experience into today’s reality (the signs of the times.) Paul of the Cross writes: “God infused into my soul in a lasting manner the form of the holy Rule to be observed by the Poor of Jesus….Under obedience and by the grace of the Holy Spirit I shall proceed to write this Rule. Let it be known that the intention God gave me with regard to this Congregation… I have written this to make it known that this was a special inspiration from God”. (The Diary and Preface to the Rule, 1720)

2. The Constitutions: a means of living out more fully the Paschal dynamic that takes place in baptismal consecration (see Const. 7).

The grace of following is, in the first place, the fruit of a personal encounter in which Jesus Christ assumes the primacy, making possible within us a free response in virtue of the Paschal Mystery. Our baptismal consecration bears the charismatic dimension of the memory of the Passion, “We seek the unity of our lives and our apostolate in the Passion of Jesus” (see Const. 5); and it also highlights that this aspect is articulated as “a call to live the fullness of Christian love in an evangelical community”. (Const. 25)

This second point allows us to recognize the Constitutions as the place or the context for listening to and receiving the word that my response shapes within me. It has as its goal that of eliciting from me a personal response within a community context of love that is fundamentally personal and radical: that which is seen in Christ in his Paschal Mystery. Thus it becomes a place of revelation, of self-giving and configuration.

One of the peculiarities of our Constitutions is the continual reference to the community as the environment in which this personal response occurs. We can study the Constitutions and cite the numerous times in which we can see this plurality: our; we are moved; we accept, etc.

3. Together with the Gospel they offer a particular charismatic way of living out our baptismal commitment in the context of the “evangelical counsels”: “We Passionists make the Paschal Mystery the centre of our lives.” (cf. Const. 65)

The Constitutions offer me a way of extending the dynamic of Jesus Christ in his Gospel. They are presented as the prism that allows me to visualize and personalize its inestimable richness. Thus “my way” is transformed by Him who is “the Way”. They are not the Gospel, but they reflect it and are its fruit. They permit and construct a means of reading the Gospel and understanding its essence: “In this same atmosphere of sharing, we ought to examine both our community living and our daily lives, taking as our standard the Gospel, our Constitutions, and the signs of the times.” (cf. Const. 27) “We accept the urgent...
demands made on each of us by the personal call of the Father to follow Jesus Crucified, namely: a personal and continual vigilance to make the Gospel the supreme rule and criterion of our life; a steadfast will to live and work joyfully as a community of brothers, observing these Constitutions in the spirit of Saint Paul of the Cross...” (cf. Const. 4) The Constitutions don’t construct this reality; they place us on the road where we can meet Christ in the charismatic community that makes us disciples who are poor, obedient and chaste. In this sense “they are a letter”, an intermediary step and not the definitive means. They are the “truth and symbol” of a “means”, conscious that Christ concluded all mediations since He is present in all of them.

The Constitutions of every Congregation present a way of living the vows since the Christ who they encounter does so through a unique and personal way, offered by means of a particular grace that the Spirit grants in the original charismatic gift. “We express our participation in the Passion by a special vow, which is at once personal, communitarian, and apostolic...In the light of this, we seek to incorporate this vow into our daily lives by living the evangelical counsels.” (Const. 6) The vow of poverty is a response to the love of Christ manifested in his becoming “poor for our sake” (cf. Const. 10); the vow of chastity introduces us to the dynamic of self-offering and the universal love of the One who came “to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Const.17); the vow of obedience forms part of the will of the Father in obedience “unto death”. (Const.20)

4. I assent to them as the “plan” that God offers me, integrating all the dimensions of my personality in a plan of action that is inserted into his “Plan of universal love and communion.”

We are a “plan” in our most fundamental and elemental anthropology. Others express it within the category of “fundamental option” made within this scope of meaning, an appropriation of values such as dynamics of existence and concrete options in a perceived and desired direction. Existence calls forth plans that are integrated into a “Unifying plan” that is formed from a synergy of dynamics that constitute us and interconnect those partial plans in which we partake.

The radical human plan that God the Father offers us consists of being “sons within the Son” from a Christian perspective. This has been ratified, confirmed and amplified in the action of Christ (historical incarnation and Paschal mystery). Without going into more detail, the Constitutions offer us a clarification or description of the human dynamics that are made “Christ like” in a visible way – similar to a parable and a sacrament. The three counsels or vows exist to make present, visualize, and actualize ways of living poorly, obediently and chastely, that Jesus chose for himself in his historical existence and Mary lived in an eminent and radical way. Furthermore, they refer to those more fundamental dynamics that constitute the human being: love, freedom and generosity. The internal dynamic of our Constitutions offer a fourth human dimension that we are called to live out in a special way which is relational and communitarian. It would seem that the insistence on the mandate “to gather companions” is constitutive to our charism.

In this sense, the Constitutions achieve a reading of Scripture that shows how the universal call to love according to the spirit of the Beatitudes and according to the lifestyle of the apostles, invites me to personal involvement in the midst of this charismatic community. The insistence on specific texts of the Scriptures is not a reductionist process or a skewed reading; rather they are keys or means of accessing the totality that allows me to become a unique configuration in virtue of the grace and the charismatic gift that is received. The Gospel shows us the “Passion of Christ and the Paschal dynamic” as a way of being Christian. Obedience to the loving will of God and at the same time, my personal configuration to this will through its “memory”, makes explicit the teaching of the Master in which being configured by the charism is elaborated: “We Passionists make the Paschal Mystery the centre of our lives. This entails a loving commitment to follow Jesus Crucified, and a generous resolve to proclaim His Passion and death with faith and love. His Passion and death are no mere historical events. They are ever-present realities to people in the world of today, “crucified” as they are by injustice, by lack of a deep respect for human life,
by a hungry yearning for peace, truth, and the fullness of human existence. Our vocation as Passionists prompts us to familiarize ourselves thoroughly with the Passion of Christ, both in history and in the lives of people today…” (cf. Const. 65)

5. The Constitutions express and accomplish communion as a theological entity

Configuration in Christ occurs within the Christian Community. It is something that the Spirit causes in that it guarantees the presence of Christ and is a source of Trinitarian communion. The Constitutions, as a document, are a sign of the creativity of the Spirit and this creative power is expressed in community life, the objective of a common plan. It simultaneously recreates community and makes it fruitful. It flowers in a family, is proclaimed and is lived in a family by establishing interaction that is similar to the hermeneutical process and growth in meaning that a text acquires as it is received by the reader. They offer me a communal identity, a sense of belonging; it facilitates human and theological bonds. It establishes fraternal life, a sense of belonging and inter-communion as charismatic categories.

“The Christian community is founded on the love of Christ, who by His Cross, ‘tore down the wall of separation’, and made all one people”. (cf. Const. 26)

The Constitutions emerge from the river of primal experience; but they allow for successive reformulations because they have not remained fossilized in the past. On the contrary, by calling forth life in various situations and diverse responses, they offer insights and new expressions in “creative fidelity”. They are a “living family book” because, enlivened by the Spirit, they are life-giving and challenging. In one sense, they remain a point of reference and a “norm”. They offer a personal and communal “theological place for discernment”.

6. The Constitutions as a personal and communal theological place of Mission from which we are sent forth.

Christ incorporates those that he has chosen to participate in his Mission, making them participants in the love of the Father and the power of the Spirit. The category “mission” is not only the specification of an external activity; it the radical continuation of its very being and its own plan. The Constitutions define the specific “Mission” as the fulfillment of the “Plan of God”. “Since we have been called to unite ourselves to the life and mission of Him who “emptied Himself taking the form of a servant”, we contemplate Christ through persevering prayer. By giving His life for us He reveals God’s love for all people, and shows the path they must follow as they make their way towards the Father. Faithfulness to this contemplation enables us to show forth His love more fully, and to help others offer their lives in Christ to the Father.” (cf. Const.5)

The Constitutions invite me to accept this task not as mere external activity; rather as being conscious of who I am, as a “point in salvation history”, as a “theological place” of “encounter” and “self-giving”. Mission, understood in this way, is a source of discernment for my activities. It allows me to understand those elements that contribute to the mission of the Congregation, how to live and how to develop my personal qualities and charisms. At the same time, Mission calls forth new gifts from me and allows me to discover new areas to be made fruitful within my own personal reality. The common Mission will call forth unity and communion in the midst of diversity. Thus we read: “Recognizing in Saint Paul of the Cross the action of the Holy Spirit, the Church with her supreme authority approved our Congregation and its Rule, and entrusted us with a mission: to preach the Gospel of the Passion by our life and apostolate.” (cf. Const. 2) “to keep constantly alive...” We Passionists make the Paschal Mystery the centre of our lives.” (Crucifix in the Founder’s room at San Carlo).
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in the hearts of the faithful the memory of the Passion, in which the love of our Saviour is so eminently expressed; and she looks to us by our apostolic labors to render more and more fruitful that redemptive love.” (cf. Const. 62; Bull: “Supremi Apostolatus) “The ministry of the word we hold in the highest esteem.”(cf. Const. 63)

7. The Constitutions offer theological insights in order to integrate charismatic and institutional dimensions in reciprocal relationship and interdependence.

The primitive charismatic experience becomes communal and institutional since this process is one of the elements that exteriorly guarantees its permanence. The human structure is corporeal and Christian revelation has its center in the “concrete humanity of the Son of God.” This incarnational element extends throughout all of human history. Although certain tensions are present, placing charisma and institution, hierarchy and prophetic

stances in opposition to each other cannot be justified. Without trivializing the tension that exists in the life of the Church and which it needs to address, we need to affirm that the institutional dimension is an element that is a part of the charismatic process and which has to be rooted in it. The institution or the “communal structures” will be the reflection – with a certain degree of objectivity and permanence – of communion. They are an aspect of communion, a way of promoting it and achieving it. The Constitutions offer us the means of living out authority with evangelical meaning, beginning with listening and obedience to the will of God, freely embraced and sought in common. Through charismatic grace, the Constitutions teach us the most adequate way to express visibly and tangibly our communion in life and mission. “As followers of Christ we too accept our role in this plan. Alert to the Father’s voice and to do His will, we try daily to ascertain His loving purpose in an attentive and loving search. Day by day, we confront our lives with the Gospel values and the example of Christ, ponder the events of life so as to discern ‘the signs of the times’.

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“The Constitutions offer me a communal identity, a sense of belonging; it facilitates human and theological bonds” (Students from Sts. John and Paul, Rome).
and endeavour to fulfill our mission by living these Constitutions under lawful authority.” (cf. Const.20)

The Constitutions allow us to perceive the importance and the need for structures and also their relative and contingent character, above all, through their concrete expression, offering ways of modification, purification or substitution.

8. The Constitutions reveal their theological character when giving evidence of their relativity and insufficiency.

The Constitutions are not an ends in themselves. By means of them we cannot establish absolutes or idols. They are “holy” to the extent that they reflect the “holy One”; they are a “way” to the degree that they reflect He who is “the Way”. Its words are holy because of the Spirit that dwells within them, directs them or presents them. In order to reveal their interior richness, “we need” the Master of the Interior Life to prepare the hearts and the minds of those who draw near to Him. They are an indispensible, but not an absolute aid. They need to be enlightened by the Gospel and enlivened by the Spirit. They run the risk of being only words if the Spirit who engendered them is not embraced by the one who contemplates them. St. Paul of the Cross wrote: “Under obedience and by the grace of the Holy Spirit I shall proceed to write this Rule... Let it be known that when I was writing, I wrote as quickly as if someone were dictating to me; I felt the words coming from my heart. I have written this to make it known that this was a special inspiration from God...” (Paul of the Cross to Bishop Francesco M. Arborio di Gattinara, Bishop of Alessandria, “Preface to the Original Rule” (XIX) (L.IV, 217-221).

He also wrote that they “are held to be a most powerful means and well suited for attaining to Christian perfection, in this state of life which they have chosen.” (Rule of 1775, Chapt. XXXVIII). The same version of the Rule of 1775 concludes using the language of that time: “If fulfilled with care and with a faithful and pure heart, they will bring you a tranquil temporal life, and likewise an eternal one, which, may the almighty and merciful God, whose glory is sought by them, impart to all. Amen.”

Conclusion: “Open your hands to receive the gift of God”

The Constitutions are incomplete and insufficient; they are not an end in themselves. To understand their essence we need to embrace them and live them. To the degree that they are a “plan” they need to “continue to be rooted in reality” and this cannot happen unless they are received as such. They present and show a way, but they only reveal their complete truth when the journey has been completed. They indicate a direction and a destiny. However, like any sign, their truth can only be perceived by the pilgrim when he arrives at the goal and the destiny to which it directed him.

The Constitutions echo what Christ accomplished by his words and deeds, as well as his personal presence — all that the Father and the Spirit revealed to Him. Furthermore, in the Constitutions we discover expressions of all that the Church is and the vocation that is proper to every Christian. They reflect and they are the fruit of the action that is unique to the Spirit in a specific person and in a specific moment of history. They offer us a means of experiencing the ongoing actuality and creative power of the gift of God in history. They offer the promise of the Spirit to promote and sustain the charismatic grace that was granted at a point in time, transforming the Constitutions into an instrument for living out in a unique way the “following of Jesus Christ” in a personal and communal way. They indicate a Mission that is incorporated in the “mission that the Father offered his Son.” They dwell in the womb of the Christian Community as “the universal sacrament of salvation.”

And they demand “to be lived”, “experienced” and “shared” in personal and communal ways so as to reveal the true reason for their existence in “salvation history”.

“Open your hands to receive the gift of God”.
On 4-5 May 2009 the Board of Directors of Passionists International met in the Passionist Community of Jamaica, New York. Those attending were: Fr. Kevin Dance (SPIR), Bishop William Kenny (IOS), Fr. Ferdinando Valsecchi (CORM), Fr. Jesús María Aristín (General Curia), Sisters of the Cross and Passion: Srs. Mary Ann Strain, Joanne Fahey, Bernadette Hughes, and Mr. John González (translator). Absent and excused were Fr. Jefferies Foale (SPIR), Mr. Tim O’Brien and Mavi Alfaro.

Fr. Ferdinando Valsecchi, was invited to this meeting as an Italian language representative of the International Commission for Solidarity. He was present with the hope of strengthening collaboration between the Passionists International Commission for Solidarity and Passionists International.

Fr. Kevin Dance, our Passionist representative at the UN reported about recent projects in this area:

(1) Participation of the NGO’s in the Committee for financial Development Assistance: On 27 April Fr. Kevin participated in the annual meeting of ECOSOC (UN Economic and Social Council), with the World Bank, F.M.I. (the Food and Marketing Institute), OMC (World Trade Organization) and UNCTAD (the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development). At this meeting the Secretary General of the UN (Ban Ki-moon) spoke about the urgent need to reform the world economic system, underlining that this objective is a matter of life and death for so many people who live in poverty. The following day he participated in a meeting of the “G77” (composed of representatives from 133 countries, including China) where they analyzed the causes of the world financial crisis and its grave consequences for the poor. This coincided with the affirmation of the urgent need to reform the structure of the current world financial and economic system.

(2) Participation in the following committees and work groups: the NGO’s committee on Human Rights (see www.un.org/webcast); the work group on Israel-Palestine that analyzed the situation in Gaza following the invasion. Three months have passed and the promised reconstruction

(L-R) Sr. Bernardette Hughes, Sr. Mary Ann Strain, John Gonzalez, Fr. Jesús María Aristín, Bishop William Kenny.
has still not taken place; The Social Development Committee is currently addressing the priority of Social Inclusion; the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Affairs in which Fr. Kevin plays a major role; and the Group on Climate Change.

(3) Fr. Kevin also participated in and represented us on the World Social Forum that met in Belén, Brazil from 26 January to 23 February studying the topic: “Another World is Possible”.

(4) Sr. Mary Ann Strain, CP, continues to work on topics associated with the work group on young women (WGG – see: http://www.girlsrights.org/newsletters.php) She also participates in the work of the Commission on the status of women (CSW53), recognizing and defending the rights of women in all environments.

(5) Fr. Kevin and Sr. Mary Ann continue to offer courses, workshops and conferences throughout the US (Pittsburgh, New York, New Jersey, etc.) as well as overseas (England, Peru, Brazil, etc.).

(6) The web page of the Passionists International (http://www.passionistsinternational.org) has been updated where they address issues of international concern that are associated with the UN and the work of our representatives.

The Board of Directors also approved the proposed budget and they spoke about the DVD that was produced by the Office for Passionist Solidarity and the Missions. This DVD contains a large amount of material about JPIC and the social doctrine of the Church. Fr. Jesús distributed copies of the new booklet entitled, “JPIC Passionist” which has been translated in six languages and has been distributed to all the Passionist communities throughout the Congregation. If anyone wishes copies they may be obtained from the JPIC/Missions office in Rome. All are reminded about the Congregation’s new web page on Justice and Peace: http://www.jpicpassionist.org/. We hope that this will provide a forum for all men and women Passionists who work in the area of JPIC. Fr. Jesús informed those present about workshops that he will offer during the upcoming weeks in Argentina, Chile, Mexico and Colombia.

Finally, the next meeting is scheduled for 13 October. In an effort to reduce travel costs, the meeting will take place via video-conferencing.

A historical moment in the Congregation: The Passionist Presence at the UN

Situated at the United Nations in New York, Passionists International intends to bring the work and the dreams and the hopes of the members of the Passionist Family around the world to bear on the decisions that are made by the 191 nations that make up the body of the UN. The initiative came from a decision of the Passionist General Chapter in Brazil in 2000. Fr. Kevin Dance (SPIR) was appointed as the first Passionist NGO representative. Facing the reality of globalization, we came to see how we are affected by the lifestyles and decisions of other countries. We wanted to find other places to express the hope and the healing that go to the heart of our Passionist charism.

On 29 May 2009 Fr. Kevin informed us that the Committee on NGO’s (Non-governmental organizations) at the UN recommended us for Special Consultative Status. This means that we can now, in our own name as Passionists, make written or oral statements at the meetings of governments within the UN system.
It was well known that from the first days of his election to the Pontificate, that Pope Benedict XVI wanted to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. I remember in 2005 he repeatedly asked the then Apostolic Nunzio to Israel, Bishop Pietro Sambi, when it would be possible for the new Pope to make a pilgrimage to Israel. Considering the difficulties of that period of “Intifada” (uprising) it would be difficult to devise a plan and establish a date. And then with the arrival of the new Nunzio, Bishop Antonio Franco, it seemed that the visit of the Pope would remain only a dream. However, all of sudden, in the autumn of 2008, everything moved into place. Not even the war in Gaza, in the early part of 2009, was able to stall this possibility. But there was one obstacle: various Christian Arabs, Palestinians as well as Israelis, felt that a visit at this time was not a good idea because they feared that in the final analysis this visit would be seen as direct support for the politics of Israel. Evidently the Pope’s visit to the Holy Land, according to the mind of the Pope, should be understood solely as a pilgrimage in order to share and sustain by prayer the peace of the local Christians and to purify and solidify the inter-religious dialog with the Jews and the Muslims. However, it could not avoid being affected by the various religious, social, cultural and political views of the different interested parties.

On Christmas night 2008, I was invited by the Italian TV station, “Telepace”, to participate in an interview about the meaning of the Pope’s visit to a Land that, while remaining holy, i.e. having an indelible uniqueness and a special vocation in the various phase of God’s salvation history, in reality it is a complex land and therefore, enigmatic and difficult to understand. The Pope – I stated in the interview – was coming to visit God’s Land, the Land of Jesus Christ, the Land of the Mother Church of Jerusalem and to visit to people of this land, all the people, of every ethnic origin (Arab and Jewish) and religion (Jew, Muslim and Christian), and to proclaim the truth about the inhabitants of the Holy Land, of whatever creed or political affiliation they belonged.

He was coming to encourage the Christians who are in the social minority, to be positive forces in meetings with the religious majorities – Jewish and Muslim – in order to reveal that for people who live in the light of God — a God who is the same for everyone – there is the one, common truth that is the presupposition for every meeting, and that there is no other God. He would encourage them to be a people who are well-disposed to forgiveness and collaboration in a society – that of the Holy Land – that is rich in ethnic diversity, traditions, languages and religious expressions and therefore, a model of universality for the entire world.

The four Passionist religious of the community of Bethany-Jerusalem shared in these hopes, which at times were dampened by the fear of possible embarrassment in the event of the unpredictable developments – negative or positive – of this papal visit. At the same time we were very hopeful that, in the final analysis, the pilgrimage of Benedict XVI would be a true blessing from God.

The Nunziature contacted the various Christian groups, priests, religious and laity, asking for their support in the event of the visit of the Pope to the Holy Land.
reflections, hopes and suggestions in order to offer the Holy Father some salient points about the socio-political and religious situation in the Holy Land. In particular, with regard to the input of our Passionist community, until the end of February of this year, we spent time in intense prayer for a “prophetic” outcome of this visit, especially during our daily Eucharistic adoration that is always part of our community prayer life. The Apostolic Nunzio asked Fr. Gianni Sgreva in particular to prepare a general report on the situation in the Holy Land, from the socio-political, ethnic and historical, religious and ecumenical points of view and to send this to the Holy See together with other materials. In this report I emphasized the universal aspect that characterizes the Holy Land and which, in the light of this vocation to universality, found in the words directed to Abraham by God (see Gen. 3:15), it would be good to consider the Holy Land as the epicenter of the world, a place of unity between two peoples and two ethnic groups, Jewish and Arab, from the perspective of the Constitutions of two States, reconciled in the same parcel of land, and open to welcoming all peoples of the Earth. I insisted on this so that in social, political and religious-pastoral languages we could go beyond a vocabulary of active and passive occupation, in order to give space and formation for a mentality of purification of memory, of re-reading of historical situations, in favor of adopting a language that would favor encounter, sharing and reconciliation. And that Jerusalem, in particular, would be considered a city that would welcome all of the children of the world, all peoples, the three monotheistic religions, by means of a statute and a special juridical definition. However this would be removed from repartitions connected with exclusivist pretexts on the part of the Israelis and the Palestinians. The Christian of the Holy Land in this plan of universal vision, not relying on the power of quotas, are encouraged to rediscover incentives for ecumenical unity at the service of the universal vocation of the Holy Land in the educational-cultural journey of its inhabitants. In particular, Catholic Christians, belonging to various rites, all present in the Holy Land, have the task of educating in a catholic-universal sense every religious, ethnic, social and political dimension of this Land.

And among the Latin Catholics, the Mother Church of the Latin Patriarchate should be exemplary in this ministry of the promotion of catholicity, in order to foster a Christian community that is bi-cultural, bi-lingual, Arab and Jewish, which educates toward the purification of memory of the Arabs and the Jews, of the Jews and the Muslims, of Christian Arabs, Palestinians and Israeli Christians. All of this in view of a universal vision in which the old city of Jerusalem would be the universal convergence point of all peoples of the earth, and therefore, contemporaneously, of the Palestinian and the Israeli peoples, of Jews and Arabs, and the other three monotheistic religions.

As the date of the visit of the Pope drew near, the preparations continued in earnest in the different areas of the local Catholic Church, in the Muslim and Jewish sectors, in the political sphere and in one area in particular – that of security. At the same time, there seemed to be some embarrassment and uncertainty on the part of the local Christians.

The visit of the Pope, divided among three days in Jordan, four days in Israel and one day in the Palestinian territory (Bethlehem) was seen, in the final analysis, as a valuable gift and a great source of consolation for the Christians themselves. In each of the various contexts the Pope expressed words of concrete encouragement to the Christians themselves in that they assume their own vocation of being a small flock whose calling is to be a source of unity, ecumenical unity, and to be instruments of...
inter-religious and ethnic reconciliation. They are called to be a positive presence in a Holy Land that politically should be administered in a context of two States, at the service of the universal dimension of the international community.

The religious of the community of Bethany, who were three during the days of the Pope’s visit (the superior, Fr. Pol Plaza (PASS) was in the Philippines for the Provincial Chapter) participated in the major moments of the Papal celebrations—concelebrating the three Papal Masses in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth. Then Fr. Gianni was present at the most significant events such as the interreligious dialog between Christians, Jews and Muslims at Notre Dame Center; at the meeting between the Pope and the Latin Patriarch and at the concluding event at the site of the Holy Sepulcher and Calvary.

Although it was very difficult to get near to the Pope because of the high level of security on the part of the Israelis, nevertheless his prophetic presence was felt through his actions and his words that profoundly touched everyone—especially the Christians, but also the Muslims and Jews. This did not exclude some strident, although hushed voices of those who wished to maneuver the Pope and his word in favor of their cause. During his almost thirty interventions, the Pope offered the Holy Land a veritable encyclical on the vocation of the Holy Land and future of peace and reconciliation for all people.

Now we have already begun the period of “reactions” to the beneficial effects that were created by the visit of the Pope. We are preparing to study the teaching of the Pope, to elaborate, if we wish, on those lines that were necessarily delicately and respectfully illusive concerning situations and projects for a Holy Land with two lungs, Arab and Jewish, with Christians of Arab and Jewish origin, in a society that is distributed between two states, Palestinian and Israeli.

The teaching of the Holy Father was also a challenge for us Passionists to be educators of a universal vision of the Holy Land. This is a vision that entails local entities, Jewish and Arab that are open to all people, precisely in the spirit of Paul the Apostle who sees in the “blood of His cross” the razing of every wall and reconciliation between Jew and Gentile (cf. Eph. 2), in the mystery of the “catholic” Church of Christ that has its origins in Jerusalem as well as its universal spirit and which embraces all peoples and nations.

Our community of Bethany, that is located in this city of Jerusalem, in this Holy Land that was visited and enlightened by the prophetic teaching of the Pope, feels itself impelled to use every means to be universal, embracing all nations, all provinces, and even local places, Jewish and Arab, in order to help the Church of Jerusalem to truly be a Mother for all peoples, to breathe with two lungs, as the maternal womb for Christian Arabs and Christians of Jewish origin, and to present them with the vision of universality, of catholicity, precisely on the basis of the Cross of Christ-Peace (Eph.1:1-14). The Pope charted the road. The task and the challenges that await us are immanent and exciting.

The banner-logo of the Holy Land is a white red cross on a white background, including four additional small crosses in the respective four quadrants of the large cross. It is as if to say that the Holy Land represents the entire world that is embraced, saved and touched by the Cross of the Lord that was planted in Jerusalem.
CHAPTER OF THE PROVINCE OF THE PASSION IN THE PHILIPPINES

From May 11-15, 2009 the Third Provincial Chapter of the PASS Province of the Philippines took place at Spiritual Center of Mindanao. In addition to the religious of the Province, also present were Fr. Ottaviano D’Egidio, Superior General, Fr. Clemente Barrón, General Consultant, and Fr. Marco Pasquali, personal secretary to Fr. General and translator for the event.

In his addresses at the beginning of the Chapter, Fr. General spoke about the history of the Province. He recalled that “the first missionaries...largely came from our suppressed missions in China, one of whom is here present, Fr. Hilarion Walters – who was also a missionary in China, and...Brother Robert McKenna, who has also been in the Philippines for many years. I especially wish to remember Fr. Malcolm La Velle, Superior General and Fr. Harold Reusch, General Consultant for the PASPAC region who spent significant parts of their lives in this land of the Philippines... The present Chapter is also a part of the history that was begun by the religious of the Province of St. Paul of the Cross (PAUL) and which continues, as do the current ten Passionist communities with the 53 religious who live and work in the Philippines, as well as the students, novices and postulants.”

During the Canonical Visitation prior to the Chapter, Fr. Clemente Barron learned from the religious about their concerns and hopes for the future of the province. In addition to the area of the economy and finances, “another area of concern in the Province is that of formation with numerous young religious in formation and with 14 young religious already in Theology, 5 novices and approximately 35 young men who are involved in a formation program.” There was also reference to the missionary endeavors of the PASS Province. It was noted that “there is great interest and anticipation especially among the young in the process of Restructuring that opens more numerous possibilities for missionary collaboration among the various parts of the Congregation. Here I wish to highlight the missionary spirit that has distinguished this Province and its generosity in collaboration with other parts of the Congregation.” Specifically Fr. General spoke of the missionary presence of the PASS province in Bethany in the Holy Land and in Sweden in conjunction with the religious of the IOS Province of England.

During the Chapter the following religious were elected to positions of leadership: Fr. Julito Sanate Villarente, Provincial Superior; Fr. Louie Yee Fuentespina, First Consultant; and Antonio Dalangbayan Saligan, Second Consultant; Fr. Nazario Poblator Benitez, Third Consultant; and Fr. Vicente Brancia Gabut, Fourth Consultant.
An Interprovincial Assembly of the religious of the regions of Spain and Portugal took place in Corella, Spain on 15-16 April 2009. Within the context of the new Configurations the goal of the meeting was to offer some material for study and decision-making during the upcoming Provincial Chapters of this region. Following the discernment document proposed in the Synod, they reflected on the three areas of Solidarity: Finances, Formation and Personnel.

The following are some of the reflections and proposals that were offered for consideration during the upcoming Chapters:

**Solidarity in Finances:**
The financial aspect is one of the elements to be considered in the new Configurations in order to achieve greater solidarity within the Configuration itself and be mindful of availability to the entire Congregation. They noted that this aspect of finances has to be viewed from the perspective of the criteria proposed by the Gospel and by religious poverty. This is for the good of the mission and revitalization of Passionist life and presence.

**Concrete proposals to the Chapters:**
— Coordination and work in common with the various provincial economes creating a commission comprised by them.
— Develop common criteria for managing material goods.
— Adequate formation for the religious who do this ministry.
— Develop criteria to establish priorities.
— Some of these priorities that needed be studied are: formation, the elderly and sick, pastoral ministry and financial commitments.

**Solidarity in Formation**
We agree that Vocation Ministry has to be organized according to the specific zones of the Configuration.

**We propose to the Chapters:**
— A team that would work at making various materials available for common use (Web page, activities, programs, etc.). The ways of doing this would be specified during the various Chapters.
— There is a need for preparation for ministry in the area of vocations and also a need for religious who are available and willing to work in this area.
— Need to keep in mind the importance of specific communities that are designated for the purpose of vocation discernment, entrusting them with this mission.

We conclude that there are future needs in the area of Formation.

**We propose to the Chapters:**
— Preparation for formation personnel.
— Create teams to coordinate the various stages and oversee the formation communities. This has to be a conscious choice.
— Endorse the formation program, in which the fundamental elements of Passionist identity are gathered, while being attentive to the specific and new mind-set of the Congregation.
The construction of the Church of “Espíritu Santo y Señor Mueve Corazones” (the Holy Spirit and the Lord, Mover of Hearts) of the REG Province in Mexico City was begun through the generosity of Mr. Carlos Hachenbeck and Mrs. Paz Pliego, a couple that was married on 19 March 1909, the day on which the cornerstone was laid for the church. The building was completed and dedicated in July, 1910.

Mrs. Pliego offered the church to the Passionists with the proviso that it would be the center and the beginning of a new foundation in Mexico. In response, the General Curia of the Passionists accepted the offer and entrusted the foundation to the Mexican Passionists, Frs. Abraham Medina, Hernán and Brother Severiano, together with Italian Passionists, Frs. Pasquale Borgia y Sergio Contini.

In 1946-47, American Passionist, Fr. Edward Viti (CRUC, 1909-1981) arrived and filled with great zeal, revived parish life in particular through the development of a catechetical program and the organization of a Eucharistic Crusade. He invited the Mexican Passionist Sisters, the Daughters of the Passion, to minister to the youth of the parish. On 24 April 1947, the Italian Passionists Frs. Benito Convento (+1992) and Nazario Gavoto (+1966) arrived from the CORM Province of Northern Italy. They assumed responsibility for the church and gradually, a new Mexican Passionist presence was established.

Chiapas is the southernmost state of Mexico, located towards the southeast part of the country. As of the mid 1990s, most people in Chiapas were poor, rural small farmers. About one quarter of the population were of full or predominant Maya descent, and in rural areas many did not speak Spanish. The state suffers from the highest rate of malnutrition in Mexico, estimated to affect more than 40% of the population.

These indigenous peasant farmers felt that their poor and largely agricultural region had been too long ignored by the Mexican government. In January 1994, indigenous rebels led by the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) in the southern state of Chiapas, Mexico rose up in protest against their government, demanding indigenous autonomy, democracy for all Mexicans, and economic policies that would benefit the majority of Mexicans rather than just a small elite portion of the population. The Passionists of the REG Province made their first foundation in this region in the Parish of San Miguel Arcángel (St. Michael the Archangel) in the city of Tumbalá during this period of open conflict between the federal government and the EZLN. This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of this presence.

One of the first events of this anniversary celebration was the blessing of the outdoor walkway in the atrium of the parish church on 2 February, during the liturgical celebration of the patroness of the parish, Our Lady of the Presentation. The construction of this walkway symbolized the journey of the Passionists in this parish during these past fifteen years.

However, the official date of the celebration was February 28, 2009. This event was scheduled to coincide with the liturgical feast of St. Gabriel of the Sorrowful Virgin, noting that there is also a neighborhood within the parish boundaries that bears this name. All of the catechists from the various communities were invited, and they agreed to give witness talks, prepare musical pieces and other forms of entertainment for this gathering. The Passionist Sisters, Daughters of the Passion, who work in the city of Tila were also present, as well as their diocesan pastor, Fr. Heriberto Cruz. The people from the neighborhoods surrounding the parish organized a social-cultural presentation, which involved the young people, children of the catechetical programs, musical groups and others.

During these celebrations tribute was paid to the great Passionist missionary, Pietro Noris (Fr. Ildelfonso) who, several days before his death in Tumbalá, Chiapas on (3 January 1994) expressed the desire that his brother Passionists assume responsibility for this mission. In some way Fr. Ildelfonso was present during these celebrations. With great gratitude to God, the province also recalled the ordination of Fr. Cristóbal Díaz, who is not only a Passionist, but also the first priest of the Ch’ol peoples of this region.

Mass celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Parish of Espíritu Santo, Mexico City.

Children celebrating the Passionist presence in Chiapas, Mexico.
MEETING AT RIVERDALE (USA) OF THE CONFIGURATION OF JESUS CRUCIFIED


The basic goal of the meeting was to address the three areas of Solidarity (formation, finances and personnel).

The groups reported that the Configuration will need to have international centers for formation (novitiate and theology), encourage our men to learn another language and recruit candidates who can learn to function/minister in other languages and cultures. A note struck by both groups is that we need to redefine our understanding of “belonging” and emphasize a new model of interconnectedness that reaches beyond the Province or individual country. Will we need to close locations in order to make personnel available to new structures responding to greater needs of formation and ministry? All emphasized that our Charism and Passionist Mission are to be at the heart of any decisions or new structures.

We need a set of standards for our Configuration to assess ministry needs and prioritize those needs. We need to encourage leadership to make difficult decisions about personnel. We need to begin preparing formation personnel for this new reality. We need to keep in mind the ten priorities and the criteria for structuring. We need to use communication avenues available to us to provide timely information to all. Younger students need to have broader cultural experiences. We need to emphasize missionary experiences among the poorest.

Maybe we need to subdivide the Configuration. We need to determine where we want the Passionist Family to be present. We need to have the attitude of St. Paul of the Cross, i.e., his sense of itinerancy and availability, going where no one else wants to go. We realize there are some patrimonies in structures of historical value; we need to develop criteria by which we can decide whether to keep these properties/structures or close them.

A finance committee will be established. They will be asked to study how each region reports their finances, whether financial reports are transparent and accurate, what are the financial strengths and weaknesses of each region, how can we establish a Fund for the Configuration, and what criteria do we use to dispense funds. We would want these members to have an awareness of the ten priorities of the General Chapter, the criteria for restructuring and a sense of Passionist mission (i.e., all decisions are not made solely on the bottom line). Fr. Francisco Valadez (REG) is the responsible agent.

A personnel committee will consist of Frs. Augusto Canali (CALV), Don Webber (CRUC) and Enzo Del Brocco (DOL). They are asked to study the personnel situation of each region, the ministry needs of each region, how to prioritize needs, how ministry relates to General Chapter directions, how decisions will be made to exchange personnel, visa challenges, how to help all personnel in the Configuration feel connected to the whole, etc.

A formation committee will consist of Frs. Paul Zilonka (PAUL), Moisés Ríos (CORI-PAC) and Juan Rosasco (CONC). Fr. Moisés is the responsible agent. They are asked to study where formation centers might be located, the pros and cons of those locations, the expenses of those locations, possible formation personnel and their preparation, projection of novices and students over the next few years, collaboration with other Configurations, develop a formation plan with an understanding of the Congregational Plan and the various Conferences of Bishops requirements for ordination, address the different educational calendars, how do we encourage learning different languages, etc.

The next meeting will be in November, 2009 in the DOL Province.
THE EARTHQUAKE IN THE ABRUZZO REGION OF ITALY AND THE SHRINE OF ST. GABRIEL

During the night of Monday of Holy Week, 6 April 2009, a strong earthquake measuring 5.8 on the Richter scale, struck the Abruzzo region of Italy, in particular the city of L’Aquila at 3:30 AM. There were over 300 deaths, more than 60,000 homeless of which 35,000 are living in tents and there are a large number of wounded. A local official described it as “an earthquake of significant proportions, the likes of which we have not experienced in the past ten years.” In addition to the loss of life, numerous public buildings and private homes were seriously damaged; some were totally destroyed.

The Passionist Shrine of St. Gabriel, of the PIET Province, is located in this region, approximately 20 km. (12 miles) from the epicenter of the earthquake. On Good Friday afternoon, 10 April 2009, Fr. Piergiorgio Bartoli, PIET Provincial Superior, reported on the situation at the Shrine, including our adjoining monastery, province infirmary and L’Eco printing press: “I too am here at St. Gabriel’s to share in the problems of my religious. The earthquake was also very powerful here at the Shrine. There have been many strong and small aftershocks, especially during the night. The old Shrine was declared uninhabitable due to several significant cracks. Also the building that houses our printing press is inaccessible due to serious structural damage... The monastery of St. Gabriel, up until now, is still intact – only some minor cracks here and there. Some of the sick in our provincial infirmary are sleeping in a trailer, while the others cannot leave their beds. The structure is holding up well and we pray that there will not be any more strong aftershocks.”

Thanks be to God, there were no deaths among our religious or their families. However, some of the homes of these families were destroyed, businesses were closed, and there are numerous other problems associated with the instability of structures and the psychological stress on individuals. Subsequently, Fr. Jesús María Aristín, Secretary for Solidarity and the Passionist Missions wrote to the religious of the Congregation and the Passionist Family concerning this situation: “It would seem that we are obligated to express our concern and solidarity for these our confreres and, through them, to their families, who in various ways form part of our Passionist Family. Solidarity is another name for the Passion and it has become one of the key words in the process of Restructuring in the Congregation. Those who are able and who desire (may) send an offering to the Office for Passionist Solidarity and the Missions (Ufficio della Solidarietà e Missione Passionista) of the General Curia.”

These were also the sentiments of Pope Benedict XVI when on 28 April he visited the region and those who were affected by the earthquake. In his address to them he said: “The crucified Lord is risen and does not abandon you. ... He is not deaf to the anguished cries of so many families who have lost everything: houses, savings, work and sometimes even human lives. Of course, His tangible response comes though our solidarity, which cannot be limited to the initial emergency, but must become a stable project over time. I encourage everyone, institutions and companies, to ensure that this city and this land may arise again.”
FIRST MEETING OF THE MAJOR SUPERIORS OF THE CONFIGURATION OF BLESSED EUGENE BOSSILKOV (CEB)

On April 21-22, 2009 the first meeting of the Configuration of Blessed Eugene Bossilkov took place in a retreat house of the Pallotines religious near Warsaw, Poland. Present were: Fr. Luigi Vaninetti, (General Consultor), Fr. Andrzej Jakimiak (Provincial Superior ASSUM), Fr. Waldemar Linke (translator ASSUM), Fr. Gregor Lenzen (Provincial Superior VULN), Fr. Lucas Temme (religious of the VULN Province), Fr. Guy Sionneau (Provincial Superior MICH), Fr. Jean Claude Delion (religious of MICH), Fr. Giuseppe Martinelli (Provincial Superior CORM), Fr. Piergiorgio Bartoli (Provincial Superior, PIET), Fr. Antonio Curto (Provincial Superior, LAT) and Fr. Leone Masnata (Provincial Superior, CFIXI).

The meeting was preceded by a day of prayer at the Shrine of Our Lady of Częstochowa, where they celebrated a Mass before the miraculous icon of Our Lady.

The group worked with the Circular Letter that Fr. General sent to the Congregation using the following method:
- listening to the responses of the Provinces to the questionnaire of the General Curia;
- listing the action steps and the decisions to be taken immediately or in the future in the three target areas of formation, personnel and finances. Those steps to be taken immediately are: learning other languages; a meeting of the CEB formation personnel; the formation of a CEB group of formation experts; and collaboration concerning the house in Lourdes (France);
- Creation of a work group composed of nine religious, three for each area of solidarity;
- The next meeting of the Provincial Superiors will take place in Bulgaria, 15-19 September 2009;
- Search and choice of a Secretary for the CEB.

In conclusion, the participants felt that the meeting was useful, practical and open to future new ventures, especially considering all of the different cultures that were present. Thus they were able to consider some concrete measures that were taken which strengthened the process and generated hope that we are entering into a period that is favorable for the life and the mission of the Congregation in these regions. They were also grateful for the wonderful spirit of hospitality offered by the religious of the Polish ASSUM Province which was a great source of encouragement for their dialog.
The Province of St. Joseph (IOS) held its provincial Chapter during 13-16 April 2009 at our Retreat House of Minsteracres, England.

Present were Fr. Ottaviano D’Egidio, Superior General, Fr. Denis Travers, General Consultor as well as Fr. Marco Pasquali, personal secretary to Fr. General and translator for the Chapter. Also present were the Provincial Superiors of the Configuration of Blessed Eugene Bossilkov: Fr. Frans Damen, of St. Gabriel’s Province (GABR); Fr. Leo Bos, of the Mother of Holy Hope Province (SPE); and Fr. Patrick Duffy, of the Province of St. Patrick (PATR) as well as the religious of the province.

In his opening address, Fr. General stated that Fr. Denis had done the Canonical Visitation. The “Conversation Days” were “a significant opportunity for members to be with one another in the Province... These days offered an opportunity for fraternity, prayer together, sharing, and the exchange of opinion.” Among the new initiatives of the Province were: the position of a province health-care coordinator (a layman) who is in dialogue with the religious when the religious need assistance in managing their health care needs. He also spoke about the new community at Herne Bay, under the direction of Fr. Mark White, Local Superior and Pastor and the activity of the community of Minsteracres under the care of the local Superior, Fr. Jeroen Hoogland (SPE). Minsteracres is a beautiful house located in a picturesque setting that is typically English. The community is also composed of laity who, in addition to caring for a small parish, also organize various hospitality projects as well as retreats for people with various difficulties. During the Chapter a proposal was approved to use a part of the house for health-care needs. In addition to the Province, there are also several religious residing there who are involved in ministry to young people with legal problems or who are in prison, as well as those who are refugees or who are seeking political asylum.

Fr. Ottaviano also referred to the missionary activity of the Province in Sweden, now over 50 years old. Many religious of the Province of St. Joseph, totaling 17, have been missionaries and have worked in the Swedish Vicariate. They have worked zealously to build the local Church, and the Province has lavished energies and a substantial financial contribution toward the growth of the Swedish Church, especially in the Province of Småland, in southern Sweden.

He also spoke about the community of Highgate where our house and parish in London, England (IOS) are located. For several years the Province of St. Joseph had planned to relinquish the parish of St. Joseph in Highgate to the Diocese of Westminster and to undertake a plan of urban development for the area of the property of the Province that is annexed to our retreat and church. However, following a meeting with the IOS Provincial and his Council and in the midst of some difficulties with the Diocese, the General Council decided that the General Curia will assume responsibility for the parish and the community. Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Connor, the Archbishop of Westminster, approved this decision and Fr. Patrick Fitzgerald (PATR) was named as pastor and Fr. Raymond Brain (SPIR) parochial vicar. Fr. General spoke of his gratitude to the provinces of St. Patrick and Holy Spirit for their generous response and for making these religious available for this mission. He also expressed his gratitude to Fr. Denis Travers for having accepted the service of “interim Superior” of the Community. For as long as will be needed, the IOS Province will collaborate with the plans that are programmed for the area.

During the Chapter the following religious were elected as Provincial and Consultors: The following religious were elected: Fr. John Sherrigton, Provincial Superior, Fr. John Kearns, First Consultor (Confirmed) and Fr. Mark White, Second Consultor.
On 25 March 1909, two Passionists arrived at “the Graan” to open a new novitiate house for St. Joseph’s Anglo-Hiberian Province. One of them was Fr. Eugene Nevin who had been in the Mount Argus community during the lifetime of St. Charles Houben and was one of his first biographers.

Later in that year a public chapel was dedicated and the first group of novices was clothed in the Habit. The community was placed under the patronage of the newly beatified Passionist, Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrows and it continued as a novitiate until 1975. Through all that time, the people of the surrounding areas came in great numbers and the fame of the place grew. Even today, the faithful still come to receive the ministry of the Passionist community.

Passionist Religious who made their First Profession of Vows in Enniskillen have served the Church beyond the territory of St. Joseph and St. Patrick Provinces in Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Chile, USA, Canada, Paraguay, India, Tanzania and other areas.

On 7 May 2009, the President of Ireland, her Excellency Mary McAleese and her husband, Dr. Martin McAleese visited the community. The local bishop, Most Rev. Joseph Duffy, and a large group of Passionists and diocesan priests concelebrated a Mass marking the Centenary anniversary. After meeting the people in a specially erected marquee, the President had lunch with the community. President McAleese is originally from the Passionist parish of Ardoynne, in Belfast, and her visit renewed contacts with some of the religious that she had previously known, including Fr. Ailbe Delany, CP, who presided at her marriage.
CONGRESS OF OUR LADY, MOTHER OF AFRICA (MATAF-PATR)

On 7th February 1952 four Passionist priests and four Cross and Sisters set foot in Bechuanaland and took over three small mission stations in the south-east of the country at the edge of the desert. Over fifty years later Bechuanaland has become Botswana and the Catholic Church has grown to a Diocese in the south and a Vicariate Apostolic in the north served by two bishops and priests and sisters from Botswana and many countries in the world. The Passionists still remain in small numbers. Over the years over 70 different Passionist priests and brothers and over 60 Cross and Passion Sisters worked in Botswana.

The Congress took place from the 12th to the 15th May 2009 at the Good Shepherd Retreat Centre, Hartbeespoort, South Africa. Fr. Arthur McCann, Regional Vicar, welcomed all to the Congress, including Frs. Pat Duffy (Provincial); Denis Travers (General Consultor) and Frank Keevins (1st Consultor, St Patrick’s Province. Also welcomed were Sr. Emer McNally, IBVM (Facilitator) and Sr. Megan Craig OP (Secretary).

In his opening address Fr. Pat spoke of the Congress taking place at a time of extraordinary change and upheaval, a time of restructuring, a time of challenge and transition and also a time of grace. A great blessing and gift is that there are many candidates at the various levels of formation and we celebrate the recent Final Professions of Ernest and O’Brien. Challenge and responsibility as well as joy and hope comes with this growth. It is our mission to continue to develop and establish Passionist African Apostolic life. We are “companions” (Const. 1) on the journey of faith together. Fr. Arthur in his report spoke of the last four years as a time of life and death, highlighting the Ordinations of Patrick and Emmanuel and the two Final Professions. He remembered also the four men who had died since the last Congress. A landmark was the opening of the first Passionist mission in Zambia, mandated by the last Congress.

An important area for the Congress to address was Formation. Here are listed the places of Formation and the numbers of students as well as Formators: Postulancy: Molepolole, Botswana, 2 formators and 5 students; Philosophy: Irene, South Africa, 2 formators and 5 students; Novitiate: Forest Hill, Botswana; Novitiate: Nairobi, Kenya: 3 novices; Theology: Nairobi, Kenya: 3 students. Of those in Initial Formation: 2 from Malawi; from Botswana; 1 and 13 from Zambia. In the light of our discussions the majority were leaning towards having Postulancy in Zambia and Philosophy in Zambia after further investigation. The following mandate to the new council was agreed unanimously: The Congress mandates the New Curia to continue and complete the investigation and movement of Philosophy to Zambia. Implications were discussed and offered as points needing further consideration. Suggestions were also made about how progress with the mandate could be communicated to the Vicariate. Review and implementation of Formation Policy could be built into any meetings that are held. Frs. Denis CP and Michael CP delivered a report – a powerpoint presentation – on the current progress on restructuring of the Congregation.

After prayer and discernment, Fr Anthony Sikholele Mdhuli CP was elected Regional Vicar; Frs Emmanuel Kabinga and Andrew Godiraone Makgetla were elected Consultors. Fr Emmanuel Kabinga was elected First Consultor. Congratulations were expressed by all and this historic moment was duly celebrated.

On the final day of the Congress an important issue regarding the sustainability of the Vicariate was on the agenda. Issues such as self-reliance, budgeting, financial prudence and generating income were part of the discussion.
The ‘field’ in which our religious labour in Congo is indeed a huge one. Congo is the third largest state in Africa with much of the land covered by tropical rainforests. The DR Congo has a population of around 70 million of which approximately 70% are Catholic. French is the national language and the capital, Kinshasa (on the western boundary of the country) has around 9 million people by all estimates. Over the past decades the Congolese people have suffered from civil unrest; invasion by rebel armies and until recent times has often lacked a strong central government. Poverty is very prevalent and many people get by on little income – often gained from small and simple ‘enterprises’ like road-side sales.

While this is part of the context in which our religious must labour, to dwell on the difficulties the Congo must face as a society is to miss so much else. There is a patience and great tolerance amongst the people. They have little apart from their family and faith life, but it means a lot to them. Every Sunday huge crowds gather in our parishes to truly ‘celebrate’ mass for up to 2-3 hours or more. The Congregation has been present in DR Congo for over 75 years and our presence here was initiated by religious form the Province of St Gabriel in Belgium (GABR). Today all but one of the religious in the Vice Province of Christ Saviour is a Congolese national and the Vice Province (SALV) is our biggest entity in the Configuration of Passionists Africa (CPA). There are 11 communities (including Jandrain Belgium) in addition to several mission areas and among the principal ministries are our 6 parishes and 4 formation houses.

In March, I joined with Fr. Guy Sionneau (Provincial MICH) for the Visitation of SALV and we were also joined by Fr. Ottaviano D’Egidio, Superior General, who visited some of the communities prior to presiding over the Congress itself. A feature of our visitation was that we were also able to visit most, if not all, the communities of Passionist Sisters, and the community of our sisters, the Daughters of the Passion, from Mexico. The Vice Province is well resourced with men who have had post-graduate or undergraduate study both abroad or within the Democratic Republic of the Congo and apart from our own formation houses, the members of the SALV are responsible for two major teaching institutions of the Catholic Church within Kinshasa.

One of the sad results of all the social disruption in the DR Congo as a result of wars in the past decade is the number of children left orphaned by such fighting and violence. Because of this urgent need, our

(L-R) Fr. Timothée Poso Tangalemba, 2nd Consultant; Fr. Ceslaw Duda, 3rd Consultant; Fr. Emery Kibal Nkufi, Vice-Provincial; Fr. Mathieu Anakani Kubanza, 4th Consultant and Fr. Willy-Felicien Okey Mukolmen, 1st Consultant.
Passionist brothers in SALV have begun an initiative to care for orphans and children deserted by family as a result of the recent wars and civil unrest. This is a collaborative project conducted with the support of a parish in Florida USA and is a most impressive outreach.

With the assistance of St. Gabriel’s Province (GABR) the Vice Province of SALV is building a new Novitiate in Kikwit (approximately 500kms from Kinshasa). This is a very impressive project and one that will be a significant development in the life of the Vice Province as it continues its journey to full status as a Province. The Novitiate buildings are simple but suitable and the location will place the Novitiate in an area where there are many other Religious Orders and resources.

Another feature of Passionist life in Congo is that many older members in SALV who originally studied in Kisima, Nairobi, have a good knowledge of other Passionists in Africa. This is a good basis for further possible collaboration within the new CPA configuration.

During the recent Congress Fr Michael Ogweno (Coordinator for Restructuring in CPA) was able to be present. Together with Michael we presented a report on the current state of our Congregational Restructuring and explained the present tasks and call to the CPA Configuration.

The Congress re-elected Fr Emery Kibal Nkufi as Vice Provincial and elected Fr. Willy-Felicien Okey Mukolmen Miki-Ile, First Consultant; Fr. Timothée Poso Tangalemba, Second Consultant; Fr. Ceslaw Duda, Third Consultant and Fr. Mathieu Anakani Kubanza, Fourth Consultant.

This year, 2009 has marked a historic moment for our Congregation. The first five months of 2009 have witnessed the four Congresses of our Vice Province of SALV (DR Congo) and the Regional Vicariates of CARLW (Kenya), GEMM (Tanzania) and MATAF (South Africa/Botswana/Zambia) and the elections of African Passionists to continuing or new positions of leadership. This changing reality – the movement from missionary leadership to that of indigenous leadership – is a wonderful moment of growth and maturity not just for this Configuration of but for the entire Passionist family as we see our Charism further incarnated into the life of the African church.

Fr Michael Ogweno, Coordinator for Restructuring in the Configuration spoke about the significance of this new moment at the CPA Configuration meeting in Kenya on 19 May 2009. In his opening address Michael said: “We gather at this historic moment in the history of our Congregation in this Continent. For the first time, the leadership of our Congregation has changed in Africa to reflect the reality that indeed Passionist life has taken root here in Africa. We acknowledge with heartfelt gratitude, the work that the missionaries from our mother provinces have done in planting the seeds of Passionist life and watering it to the point that we have reached today. We wish to thank them all, those who are still present with us, those who have gone back to their home provinces and particularly those who have passed on to the next life. We pray that God will shine His perpetual light upon them and reward them with eternal life. I am certain that it was not an easy task for the missionaries to do what they have done up to this stage. There had to be many struggles and sacrifices made to establish the Congregation in Africa. They gladly made it and we are today the fruits of that labour and those sacrifices”.

NEW LEADERSHIP FOR THE CONFIGURATION OF THE PASSIONISTS OF AFRICA (CPA)

(L-R) Fr. Raphael Mangiti (CORM); Fr. Denis Travers, General Consultant; Fr. John Muthengi Kathoka (CORM); Fr. Anthony Sikhalele Mdhulu (PATR-MATAF); Fr. Aloysius John Nguma (CORM); Fr. Emery Kibal Nkufi (SALV); Fr. Priscus Michael Massawe (CORM); Fr. Francis Keevins (PATR); Fr. Michael Ogweno (PATR-MATAF); and Fr. Patrick Duffy (PATR).
Directors of the Passionist Family Group Movement (PFGM) from around Australia and New Zealand met last weekend at the Stradbroke Room in the Province Centre at Marrickville. Twenty five people were present.

Apart from reports presented by each Director, there was time given to reflecting and sharing on the theme of ‘Mission’ and on the medium to long-term plan of the Movement with particular emphasis on the engagement with young families, youth and schools.

Among the topics that were discussed, the following were stressed: Formation of similar age, cultural or interest groups was encouraged; Guidelines for a process to recruit Parish Coordinators were set in place; and Challenges for the Directors and their future role in 5-10 years.

As the founder and coordinating Director of the Movement, Fr. Peter McGrath, continues to dedicate his life to this ministry, travelling far and wide, nationally and internationally, to inspire and motivate group leaders and members to create and be “A FAMILY FOR ALL”.

Fr. Brian Traynor’s commitment to establishing and nurturing the PFGM in New Zealand was recognised during this weekend gathering when the NZ Representatives presented him with a gift marking the 21st year of the Movement’s life in NZ.

The FAT Provincial Superior, Fr. Laureano Alves, wrote in the bulletin of the Province: “May the Lord be with us and bless us in this venture of a new Mission — something that is always difficult. May this step, that the entire Province shares, be for the greater glory of God, for the good of the Church and of the Congregation which we all love and wish to see continue to grow”.

The FAT Province of Portugal has opened a new house in the diocese of Viana in Angola. The diocesan bishop offered us the pastoral ministry of the Shrine of St. Joseph in the city of Calumbo. He also donated the land on which a house for Passionist formation will be built.

In the month of July, 2009, Fr. Gabriel Querubim Moreira dos Santos will begin this new ministry in the Shrine and in September he will be joined by two additional religious, Fr. Bruno Dinis and Fr. Hugo Figueria. In addition to the pastoral work of the Shrine, they will also assume responsibility for the mission area of Zangos.

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FR. THOMAS BERRY (PAUL)

Historian of cultures

Fr. Thomas Berry a Passionist religious and priest and internationally recognized historian of cultures, died on June 1st, 2009 at Well-Spring Retirement Community, Greensboro, North Carolina. His writings and lectures on the relation of humans with the cosmos and the earth have notably influenced the intellectual and spiritual history of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Born in 1914, he was the second of eight sons in a family of thirteen children. In 1933 he entered the Passionists and assumed the name “Thomas” after philosopher-theologian St. Thomas Aquinas. Thomas began doctoral studies in history at the Catholic University of America, writing on the historical theory of Italian philosopher-historian Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), published by the Catholic University of America Press in 1951.

Believing the wisdom of Asia indispensable for adequate learning, Thomas went to China in 1948 to teach at Fu Jen Catholic University in Beijing and returned to America when Mao took over China in 1949. Subsequent studies in Chinese language and culture at Seton Hall University, New Jersey and, later, Sanskrit and South Asian culture at Columbia University, New York City. These were interrupted by service as United States Army Chaplain in Germany 1951-54. Afterwards Thomas undertook a teaching career, first with the Asian Institute of Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey, 1956-61; then with the Asian Institute at St. John’s University, Jamaica, New York (1961-65); finally, as Associate Professor of Religion at Fordham University, New York (1966-79), where he instituted the doctoral program in the History of Religions.

In 1970 Thomas inaugurated the Riverdale Center for Religious Research (1970-95) in Riverdale, New York. From this base and with his presidency of the American Teilhard Society (1975-1987), Thomas’s international influence as thinker, writer, and lecturer expanded rapidly. His awards include seven honorary doctorates; the United States Catholic Mission Association Award (1989); the 1992 James Herriot Award of the Humane Society of the United States; Honorary Canonship of the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine (1992); the 1993 Bishop Carroll T. Dozier Medal for Peace and Justice; the Catholic University of America Alumni Award for Research and Scholarship (1993); and the 1992 Prescott College Environmental Award.

FR. DAMIAN WOJTYSKA (ASSUM)

Professor at the Catholic University of Lublin and Historian

Father Damian Wojtyska, historian, theologian, priest, Passionist, died on March 24, 2009 at the Passionist Community of Lodz, Poland. He was 75 years old. Henryk Damian Wojtyska was born on 13 May 1933 near Regiminie Ciechanów. He entered the Passionist Congregation in 1950 and was ordained a priest in 1957. In the years 1958 to 1962, he studied church history at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. His doctoral thesis was on the work of Cardinal Hosius, Legate to the Council of Trent (published in 1967).

In 1969 he became a researcher and lecturer at the Catholic University of Lublin. He obtained his Habilitation (post-doctoral degree) in 1975 on Diplomatic Relations between Poland and the Papacy 1548-1563 (published in 1977), and was appointed the first Professor of the History of Theology at the Catholic University of Lublin, a post he held from 1976 to 1998. Between 1981 and 1983 he was the University’s Vice-Rector for Youth. In the difficult period of martial law, he was accustomed to visiting students who were in custody and accompanying them to court. He organized active assistance for those who need it. For this reason, he enjoyed great respect and the confidence of young people.

From 1985 to 2004, he was a member of the Pontifical Committee of Historical Sciences in the Vatican. In the years 1985-94, he was Vice-President of the Polish Historical Institute in Rome. During these years, he began editing the series Acta Nuntiaturae Polonae, the first ten volumes of which appeared between 1990 and 1994, under his direction. He is the author of the first volume in the series (Acta Nuntiaturae Polonae. T. 1: De fontibus eorumque investigatione et editionibus. Instructio ad editionem. Nuntiorum series chronologica. Rome 1991). He also published studies in the same series on individual nuncios.

A member of the Scientific Society of Lublin and the Scientific Society of the Catholic University of Lublin, the Accademia di San Carlo (Borromeo) and the Reformation Commission of the Historical Committee of the Polska Akademia Nauk. Until 2004, he was a Consultant of the Doctrine of the Faith Commission (Historical Section) for the Polish episcopate.

He was Provincial of the Polish Passionist Province from 1994 to 1998. In the years 2006-07, he published a monumental work on the history of the Passionist Congregation in Poland (volume 1 - Prehistory and Foundational Period to 1938, Lodz 2006; volume 2 - War and Occupation 1939-1945, Przasnysz 2007). He also published a book on the Polish Passionist Martyrs of World War II (Przasnysz 2008).
On 30 April 2009 in the cemetery of Rocca di Papa, Rome, a ceremony took place during which a commemorative plaque was blessed and installed on the tomb of Fr. Diego Alberici, CP by Fr. Ottaviano D’Egidio, Superior General of the Passionists. Also present at this celebration were Mother Guadalupe Aguilera, CFP, Superior General of the Daughters of the Passion, and the community of the Sisters of Rome, as well as several religious of the local community and representatives of the civil authorities of the region.

Fr. Diego Alberici (PRAES, 1846-1904) was the Founder of the Congregation of the Daughters (Hijas de la Pasión de Jesucristo y de María Dolorosa) in Tacubaya, Mexico together with Mother Dolores Medina y Zepeda (1860-1925) in 1896. They were founded for the purpose of teaching catechism to young girls, especially among the very poor. Their apostolate now includes teaching and administering schools for girls and other forms of pastoral ministry, including many apostolates that they share with the Passionist religious, including caring for the community of the General Curia in Rome. The Institute has houses in 8 countries, for the most part in Central America.

PRIESTLY ORDINATIONS

Fr. Melquíades Lima Filho of the SPE-LIBER Vicariate was ordained to the priesthood in Brazil on 7 February 2009. On 7 March, 2009 in the CALV Province of Brazil, Fr. Francisco das Chagas da Silva Marques was ordained to the priesthood. In the THOM-CRUC Vicariate of India, Fr. Thomas Anamattathil Varughese was ordained on 18 April 2009. Frs. Christopher Barde Akiatan, Stanley Dalagon Baldon, Mark Reggan Gregory Tobias and Rey Carvyn Pedrera Ondap of the PASS Province of the Philippines were ordained on 11 May, 2009. On 16 May, in the PIET Province of Italy, Fr. Giuseppe Simeoni was ordained to the priesthood and in the same Province on 18 June 2009, Fr. Marco Catorcioni was ordained.
PROFESSIONS AND ORDINATIONS

On 22 February 2009, our religious Anaclet Muke Samba and Thierry Ntam Yer-iyu of the SALV Vice-Province of Congo were ordained to the diaconate. In the CRUC-THOM Vicariate of India, Shaji Joseph, Dennish Joseph Muricknamkuzhiyil, Junesh Xavier Vakkapadath and Sugun Vilayilayath Veed were ordained deacons on 19 March 2009. On 23 March 2009, the following religious of the DOL-VICT Vicariate of Brazil was ordained to the deaconate: Aurélio Aparecido Miranda. Our religious Augustine Ekechukwu and John Okafor of the PRAES Province of Italy were ordained to the diaconate on 4 April, 2009. And finally, on 19 April 2009, Juan de Dios Antonio Mondragón Velásquez and Omar Trejo Valdéz of the FAM Province of Spain were ordained deacons.

PROFESSION OF FIRST VOWS

In the MACOR Province of South Korea, the following religious professed First Vows on 27 February 2009: Marius Jae Hyong Lee and Joseph Francis Song-Ho Park. On 28 February 2009 in the CORI-RES Vicariate of Peru, José Manuel Sandoval Flores professed First Vows. On 22 March 2009, Johannes Rothärmel and Markus Seidler of the VULN Vice-Province of Germany-Austria professed First Vows. And finally, on 2 May 2009 in the PASS Province of the Philippines the following religious professed First Vows: Wilver James S. Neri, Arlan A. los Baños, Froilan P. Somodio, Gilbert G. Ytac, and Fr. Lai Xue Long.

PROFESSION OF FINAL VOWS

In the CRUC-THOM Vicariate of India, four religious professed Final Vows: on 17 March 2009: Deacons Shaji Joseph, Dennish Joseph Muricknamkuzhiyil, Junesh Xavier Vakkapadath and Sugun Vilayilayath Veed. And in the PASS Province of the Philippines, the following religious professed Final Vows on 02 May 2009: Jovanni Tomon Abad.

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### NOTITIAE OBITUS

Usque ad diem 15 febbraio 2009 – 12 giugno 2009, acceptae

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### MONIALES ET SORORES DEFUNCTAE

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“I wrote as quickly as if someone were dictating to me; I felt the words coming from my heart. I have written this to make it known that this was a special inspiration from God…”

St. Paul of the Cross to Bishop Francesco M. Arborio di Gattinara, Bishop of Alessandria, “Preface to the Original Rule” (L.IV, 217-221)