

The Restructuring of the Congregation

COMMENCEMENT LETTER

My dear brothers,

God is at work in the history of the world and in all of creation, and He enlivens it, He continually calls us to be an effective part of His work. The designs of God, that are even traceable in the “signs of the times” and are illuminated and explained by the Spirit, forcefully urge us to make adequate decisions in order to give new life and efficacy to our mission.

The Synod that was celebrated in Rome from 26 November to 6 December, 2004, designated Restructuring as an instrument for the revitalization of the Congregation and for opening new horizons and perspectives for the Passionist vocation. Therefore, with the mandate of the Synod and the full consensus of the Council, I decree the commencement of the “Biblical” process of Restructuring. It is a “call” of God and as such I communicate it to you as such: *“Eli then understood that Yahweh was calling the child, and he said to Samuel, ‘Go and lie down, and if someone calls say: ‘Speak, Lord; for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. Yahweh then came and stood by, calling as he had done before...”* (1 Sam.3:8-10) God speaks to Samuel, but Samuel does not recognize the voice of the Lord. God was recognizable through the mediation of Eli, Samuel’s master and guide: *“Eli then understood that Yahweh was calling...”*

The process-road toward restructuring will be guided by the General Council, but the involvement of all of the religious is also needed. During the meeting at the end of February with all of the Consultors we agreed on a plan to concretize the decisions of the Synod.

The process will unfold in various phases over a period of eight years and hopefully will be concluded by the General Chapter of 2012. The first phase will begin now and last until the General Chapter of 2006. The three successive phases will take place from October, 2006 until the General Synod of 2008; the other until the General Synod of 2010; and the final phase, hopefully, until the General Chapter of 2012.

We have established a commission to assist the General Council in the undertaking and the realization of this process. The members of the Commission are: Frs. Denis Travers (SPIR), Adolfo Lippi (PRAES) and Nicholas Posthewaite (JOS). Fr. Nicholas will also serve as president of the Commission. The Commission will be assisted by a Secretary and various administrative services.

The three objectives of the first phase, i.e. for the next General Chapter, are as follows:

- the positive involvement of every religious in the process of spiritual and institutional renewal that God is asking of us;
- the creation of a planning process that helps the entire Congregation to walk together;
- the reformulation today our Passionist vision for the world of tomorrow for the purpose of addressing the changes that God has placed before us.

In order to accomplish these objectives we propose the following general principles together with action steps:

1. General Principles:

- A) The work will be based upon dialog, i.e. the entire Congregation will be involved in the process of dialog and discernment. The Commission will formulate the questions that will be presented and distributed to the various parts and components of the Congregation.
- B) Additionally, more specific questions will then be formulated from the responses to these

- initial questions.
- C) These responses will form the basis for the following step which should gradually lead to a composite picture of the process formed by a communal contribution.
 - D) Participation in the process should bring about the conversion of the entire Congregation. Only profound interior change will enable each of us to contribute to the renewal.
 - E) We are convinced that this process, the fruit of reflection, dialog and prayer is necessary if we wish to reclaim our unique Passionist lifestyle as a model for the future.

2. In addition to all of the religious of the Congregation, the entire Passionist family, women religious and laity, will also be kept informed with regard to the process of Restructuring that we are undertaking during the next eight years. We are also proposing specific questions to them in the hope of receiving valuable contributions as well as positive criticisms from them. The Passionist Family should also have a part in the process of Restructuring. The two specific processes, those of the Congregation and the Passionist Family, should be autonomous and without any mutual interference.

3. We have asked twelve Passionist religious to help us, according to their personal vision, in describing for us how they imagine, think and dream that the Congregation should be by the year 2012 and beyond.

- a) These contributions can offer us suggestions and involvement for the newly initiated process.
- b) By the end of 2005 the Consultors of the major Superiors, as well as the individual communities, we be asked to offer responses to the questions as well as for their reflections in order to help us to formulate the initial steps of the proposed eight years of the process.
- c) I note that during this time period two General Chapters and two General Synods will be celebrated. The Commission for Restructuring and the General Council will meet on a regular basis especially on the occasion of the Consultas already programmed in order to insure an integral process that will represent the full spectrum of the life of the Congregation.

Additionally, I'd like to make it clear that until the next General Chapter of 2006, there will not be any specific changes; rather, it will be a time of dialog: a free exchange of one's own ideas toward a clearer vision of the world and of our Congregation within the world.

During the period 2005-2006 we will try to establish and integrate the preparatory plan of the General Chapter of 2006 with that of the process of Restructuring in order to bring about a synthesis of objectives between the General Chapter and that of Restructuring.

My dear brothers, this may seem to be a complex process, but as we begin its undertaking we will come to understand it more clearly. We will be like the blind man of Bethsaida, which Mark the Evangelist describes (Mk. 8: 22-26), to whom Jesus, after placing spittle on his eyes, asks the question: "*What do you see?*" And he, beginning to see, responds: "*I can see people; they look like trees as they walk around...*" Jesus again laid his hands on him and the man saw clearly.

Even on the shore of the lake of Genesaret, after the Resurrection, Jesus presented himself to his disciples, but they could not recognize him. They had not caught any fish and Jesus invited them to try again: "*Throw out the net...and you'll find something. So they threw the net out and they could not haul it in because of the quantity of the fish. The disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord.'*" (Jn. 21: 5-7) We, too, will recognize the Lord by listening to his invitation, the "call" to Restructuring, and acting upon it. The positive collaboration of every religious, community, vicariate, vice-province and province and everyone belonging to the Passionist Family, will be on our road to Emmaus. The difficult week of the Passion including Good Friday and

sudden darkness: “*When the sixth hour came there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour*” (Mk. 15:33), will be like a sign of death, with Jesus, as was old covenant for the new covenant. It is similar to the Paschal Mystery, which was made visible in the darkness of midday, incorporating the entire universe into a new creation. It will be a darkness that will also invaded the heart and the mind of the disciples in such a way that they did not understand the events and the plans of God “*regarding Jesus of Nazareth*” who was condemned to death and was crucified. “*We were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place...Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning ...and reported that...he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see. And he said to them, ‘Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe...Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ Then they recognized him in the breaking of the bread, Jesus, “the stranger”, who had accompanied them on the road, trying to reason with them, “but he vanished from their sight... So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem...’The Lord has truly been raised...’ Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road...”* (Lk. 24: 13-35)

The process of Restructuring is a road. We will talk among ourselves about trying to understand the ways of God and we will converse with the Lord. It will happen to us as we leave Jerusalem (from our communities and present realities) to begin the process, perhaps sorrowful and sad. But the Lord will speak to us, our hearts will burn as we walk along the road and our eyes will be opened so that we can recognize him.

We will return, as did the disciples of Emmaus, “*without delay to Jerusalem*” to announce that the Crucified One is Risen!

We will announce it to ourselves as we “gather” and to the all the world: this is our Mission!

“Stay with us Lord...it is nearly evening.”

My sincerest best wishes for a Happy Easter to all our religious and to all the Passionist Family.

Fraternally,

Fr. Ottaviano D’Egidio, C.P.
Superior General

Rome, Sts. John and Paul
20 March 2005, Palm Sunday

