

Prot.n. 20050115

LETTER OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL TO THE CONGREGATION

Dear Brothers,

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Together with the General Council and the members of the Restructuring Commission, I thank you for the many and positive responses you have shared with us as part of the process of the Restructuring of the Congregation in which we are all engaged. As you will remember, I wrote to the whole Congregation in May 2005 requesting your prayerful, community reflections on three questions about how we envision Passionist life in the future. In particular: a) how do we strengthen and deepen our commitment to the Passionist “Charism”; b) in what new ways do we hope to see our Passionist “presence” grow; c) what are our insights for helping to further enhance our witness to the Passion in our “mission”.
- 1.2. I invited each Provincial Council and every community and religious of the Congregation to respond to the previously stated three questions.
- 1.3. So far, we have received nearly 170 separate replies to these questions and they are still arriving. As you can imagine, they include a wide range of views and different perspectives. In fact, they reflect the different cultures, situations and orientations of the richness of Passionist life throughout the whole world. This was not a scientific survey: it was not a questionnaire that would lead us to premature conclusions or a re-definition of the organisation of the Congregation.
- 1.4. The invitation was sent to Passionist religious, each of whom is committed and engaged in a wide variety of situations within the 59 countries where we are present and where we minister. The invitation originated in the belief of the General Synod of 2004 that only with the most extensive involvement of the religious in the process can Restructuring be fruitful and afford new vitality for the Congregation. If not, it will be a theoretical and possibly sterile exercise.
- 1.5. The fact that so many have responded to the questionnaire is encouraging to us. For me and for the members of the General Council your responses demonstrate your great love and commitment to the Congregation.
- 1.6. In one response, a Passionist quoted a poem of Charles Peguy (*The portico of the mystery of the second virtue*) in which he uses an image of three sisters walking together, holding hands. The big sisters are Faith and Charity and the little sister is Hope; but it is the little child, Hope, who pulls the other two sisters along with her. This was his way of ending his response to our questionnaire and encouraging all of us to go forward in hope for the future of the Congregation. Problems exist; there are numerous difficulties in the various areas

and regions of the Congregation; however, there is also great vitality, a capacity for sacrifice, for work and for hope in the future.

2. Work of the Restructuring Commission

- 2.1. As you can see, the work of analysing and collating these 170 responses has required a great deal of work. Father Elie Muakasa, as secretary for the Restructuring Commission, has forwarded all your replies to the Commission. The three members of the Commission are working to analyse your responses so that we can discern the shared and disparate views of the Congregation about how we should move forward in this process. Unfortunately, because of illness, Father Adolfo Lippi was not able to join the Commission when it met in Adelaide (Australia) at our General Council meeting; but despite this setback he was able to make his contribution in written form to the other two members of the Commission.
- 2.2. The Restructuring Commission reported to the General Council during our meeting in Adelaide in September. We discussed their preliminary findings and consequently, we will make some further requests for assistance in order to better understand the mind of the Congregation as to how we are to proceed at this point. However, it is important for everyone to realise that the 170 replies written in eight different languages, will require significant time and ongoing work to be adequately assessed.

3. The Present phase in Restructuring

3.1 It is important to remember that we are only beginning a process that will continue through the next General Chapter and the subsequent two Synods to the General Chapter in 2012. Thus, at this early stage, it would be a mistake to anticipate all the subsequent phases of this process. The road will be illuminated by our own reflections and by the steps that will emerge from them. There are no preconceived solutions; however, we will arrive at them by listening to the Holy Spirit who will reveal them to us via dialogue and through the prayers of the entire Congregation as well as by means of the sufferings of our sick religious as well as the sick of the Passionist Family, that are offered to God for this intention. Their suffering and their weakness lived in faith can become a source of power for the Congregation.

3.2 In this first restructuring phase we are seeking to engage the whole Congregation in the process of restructuring and to move forward towards the General Chapter of 2006. We want to ensure that the pre-Chapter preparations and the Restructuring process are two parts of one integrated dynamic. To this end, your responses to these questionnaires are crucial to discerning the future priorities of the Congregation.

3.3 I have written to the Major Superiors of the Passionist nuns and Sisters to inform them of our hopes. I am inviting them to share their wisdom with us and to offer any support or collaboration they are able so to move forward together.

3.4 We also intend to invite the lay members of our Passionist Family to participate in this process. This will happen in the ensuing stages.

4. The 2nd Step in the present restructuring phase: “Towards the General Chapter of 2006”

4.1 The essence of the work to be done between now and the Chapter is to clarify some of the choices the Congregation faces and to create the dialogue within which those choices can be made. Only by naming our priorities can we achieve a deeper sense of unity of life and mission and thus create the foundation for a Passionist future in tomorrow’s world.

4.2 The next General Chapter represents a crucial moment in the overall Restructuring process in that it must help us re-focus our vision for the future of our Congregation.

5. Two immediate tasks

5.1 In order to move forward in our Chapter Preparation, I am asking for additional help from Provincials, Vice-Provincials and Regional Vicars. This is an invitation that I am extending to everyone, even those who are overwhelmed with work. Everyone should have a sense of involvement and commitment before God and the Congregation. No one may excuse himself from this task. Together with this letter there is a detailed questionnaire to which the Major Superiors must respond by next December 1.

5.2 I also ask the Major Superiors to seek ways of encouraging the younger members of the Province or Vicariate to voice their hopes for this restructuring process. While every individual Passionist is concerned for the future of the Congregation, it will be the younger ones who will bring to fruition the dreams of the Congregation.

5.3 The questions posed in the accompanying appendix are for the Major Superiors. However, we share them with the whole Congregation, sending them to all the communities, in the hope of respecting the sense of transparency which we are trying to create for the whole of the restructuring process.

5.4 May St. Michael the Archangel, whom St. Paul of the Cross considered to be one of the protectors of the fledgling Congregation, deliver us from every evil and keep us far from the temptations of indifference, discouragement and disinterest and make us advocates and missionaries of the life of God in us and in the world.

Rome, 29 September 2005
Feast of St. Michael the Archangel

P. Ottaviano D'Egidio
Superior General CP